

THE PLACE OF TRANSLATION IN A LITERARY HABITAT AND OTHER LECTURES

**FOUNDATION DAY LECTURE SERIES
2003**

ALOK BHALLA



**CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES
MYSORE**

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By

Alok Bhalla

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**For
my daughter
Udita**

Preface

Writing situates a text, addresses itself to concerns of the speech community, engages in a dialogue with the readers who share the same time and space, and thus finds a natural 'habitat'. Translation, on the other hand, is an activity in unsituating the text. It transports the corpse, as it were, to another land, and on the way, keeps its engagement with the text by asking and answering numerous questions, as the translator still looks for ways to get out of the woods. Once the text reaches a Newfoundland, and is made to put on new garbs, it does not look the same. And yet, it must make the same connections as the story unfolds to the new found readers as were made for the original set of readers. That is often a tough job to be undertaken. But, then, one could very well take the easier route and flout all such requirements. After all, the target language readers would not know what they have missed out, if a passage, or an expression or an allusion is dropped in course of this transportation to another habitat.

What Alok Bhalla is trying to tell us here is that while theorists could always find out innumerable strategies and justifications behind any move one makes in course of such renderings, the translator himself must have a code of ethics to follow when attempting to undertake this arduous journey through the difficult terrain. Any one who prides himself as an accomplished translators, to my mind, must remember the *Naarada* test that the proverbial smart manipulator of saints had had to face. *Naarada* was confident that he could perform multiple tasks at the same time with equal ease – something that any translator must do. To pound on the pride that *Naarada* exhibited, *Lord Vishnu* is credited to have asked him to have a cup full of oil in hand, and go around the whole world to see all kinds of people and places, and come back and report to him, without spilling a single drop of oil in the process. It goes without saying that *Naarada* could neither see the people, nor discover the spaces he traversed through as his fullest concentration was on not letting a drop of oil fall. A translator has to outdo *Naarada*, by doing so many things at the same time - by looking for lexical equivalences, corresponding syntactic strategies, letting the content be as undistorted as possible, looking for comparable collocations, making the

characters and the contexts come alive in a completely different space (and often, at a different time).

On top of this all-out effort in outsmarting *Naarada*, it is often the case that the translator is often viewed as a 'parasite', and an unnecessary evil. Many creative writers sincerely believe that a translator is a pest of a writer – that too, often a failed one, waiting for eggs to splash on the face of the source text to smear it beyond recognition, and etching to write on something that he would not have been able to do left to himself. Given this hostility, and the thanklessness that are both parts of his original contract, it is surprising that in many cases, still, the spirit is indomitable. Of course, we also have the contrast in translators like Fitzgerald who would like to teach an art or two to the original authors. The translation theorists try and find a place for themselves in between these two extremes, and try to propose many explanations for the choices translators have made while trying to get on with their job. What they call strategies are often coincidences or even display of lack of concern and understanding. What they describe as smart moves are often compulsions that are imposed by the target culture or language.

Nevertheless, there are translators who are careful and conscientious and are, therefore, ever ready to create new combinations, collocations and expressions, or make compromises by providing enough warnings (in the form of notes) that the choice made was a poor replacement in the target text. The point that assumes great significance in course of these lectures is the question raised by Professor Bhalla about the place of translation theory in the imaginative and conscientious act of translation, and whether the latter would ever benefit from the wars that are waged in the world of theorists of all kinds. Or, whether translators should be left alone to do things that they know how to do the best.

Serious translation initiates a dialogue – across ages, among peoples, amidst confusing cries, and around a set of ideas and ideals. One descends in the maze of lexicon and must find one's way out of it. Two words – belonging to different space and time, suddenly learn to walk hands in hand. The syllables that harmonize with one kind of breathing in the heart of the original poet find another pattern to rhyme with in another habitat. Scrambles

and extra-positions are out at their best, trying to make all kinds of adjustments in the target language. While all this happens, as theorists, let us wait outside the arena and watch how negotiations are made, what logical pattern emerges from all-out attempts at discovering the deep structure, and how this whole speech act is bound by an unwritten set of ethical rules.

On behalf of the community of writers, translators and theoreticians, and especially on behalf of the CIIL-fraternity, I must thank Professor Alok Bhalla for having graced us by giving these timely warning signals while delivering our Foundation Day Lectures on July 15th through 17th, 2003, and in course of doing so, creating a platform of discussion where the *Mahabharata* and *Manto* become alive – together, breaking the fetters that bind our cultural spaces and try to confine them into histories and mythologies of narrowly defined geo-political entities. The only pity is that a time has now come, after half a century of divide and avoidable bloodshed, when two brothers need to translate each other to make sense out of our spaces and texts that grow out of them.

Mysore
October 28, 2003

Udaya Narayana Singh

Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Prof. Udaya Narayana Singh, the Director of the Central Institute of Indian Languages, Mysore, for doing me the honour of inviting me to deliver the annual Foundation Lectures of the Institute in July 2003. I should like to take this opportunity to thank him and the staff of the CIIL (particularly Professors Rajyashree, Rakesh, Ranjeet Singh and Halemane) for having treated me with courtesy and extended to me all the necessary help during the days I spent in Mysore.

The set of three lectures published in this monograph have a kind of sequence and a plan. The two lectures on the translations of stories of Saadat Hasan Manto and the play, *Andha Yug*, by Dharamvir Bharati, are based on my own experiences as a translator. In these lectures, I have tried to speculate about my own political, religious and ethical concerns which may have led me to choose certain kinds of texts for translation. It is strange that while I have no personal understanding of what a religious experience is or could be like, and while I am not a passionately committed political ideologue, the works I have chosen to translate over the past decade or so have always led me to the edges of the religious and the political. In order to understand why I have chosen certain kinds of texts for translation, I have found myself turning to the writings of figures like Gandhi, Emerson and Simone Weil each of whom mingle the religious and the political to answer the only serious question we should, perhaps, be concerned with – the serious Socratic question – ‘how should we live?’ In these lectures, I have rarely quoted from their writings. Yet, throughout these lectures, they have been real presences for me, for without them I would not have been able to take the few tentative steps I have taken towards an understanding. The lineage of gurus I have lined-up for myself is deliberate, for I want to indicate at the outset that the literary habitat I want to establish for myself is distinctly different from the intellectual style of the times in which we live.

I use the word ‘habitat’ in the third lecture because it refers not only to ‘home’, but also contains in it the word ‘habit’ – a habit that comes from a tradition of living and thought. What I am trying to indicate by using the

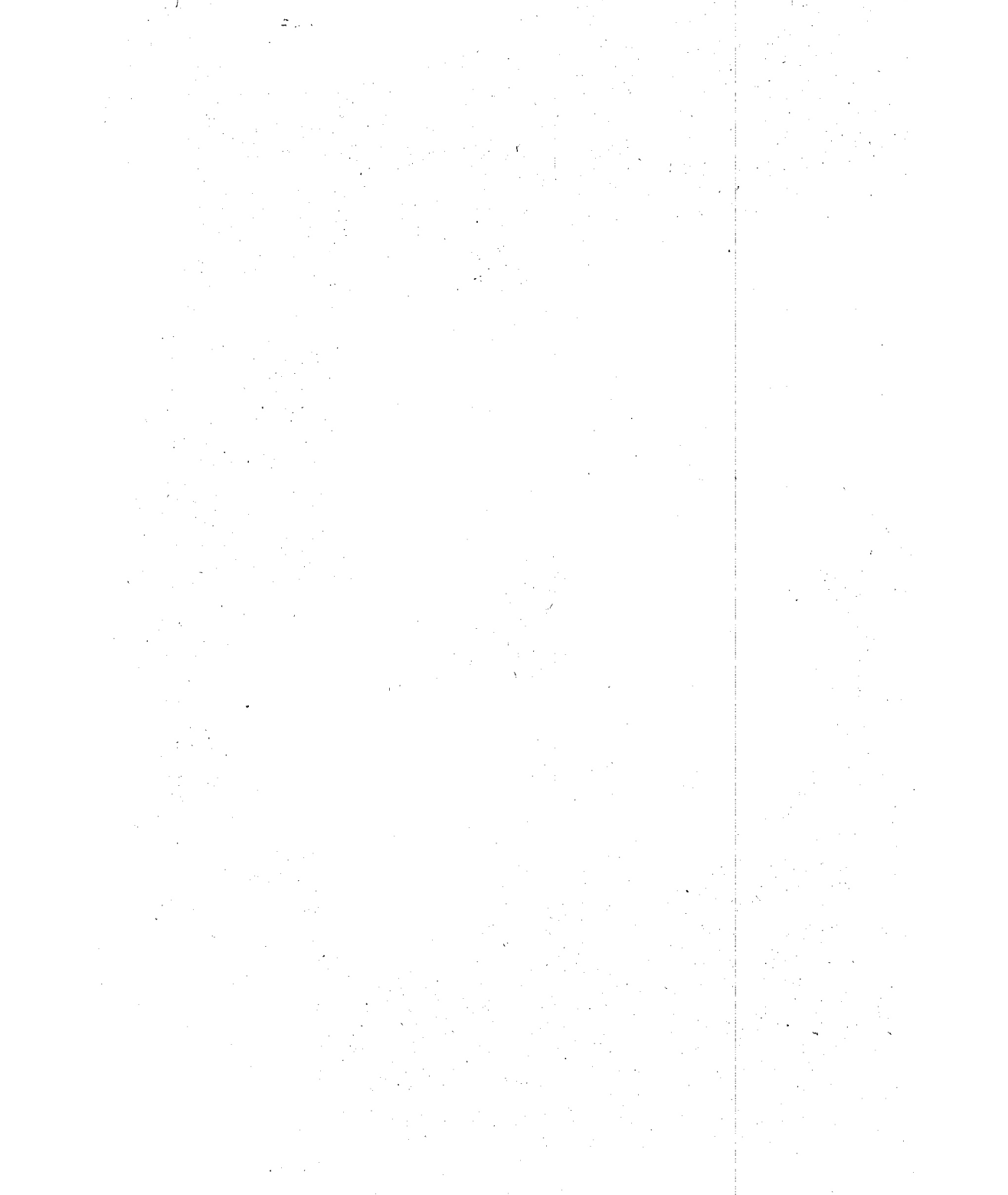
word ‘habitat’ with such deliberateness is the fact that the texts I have translated, and my own concern with the theories of translation, are tried up with my attempt to define the civilisation in which I live. This civilisation is clearly not defined by geographical boundaries, though I am sure that it can not exist without a sense of what those boundaries could have been like in history and at present are. Perhaps, one way of explaining what I mean by my ‘civilisational habitat’ is to describe the experience I had soon after I arrived at the Mysore station. I was received by Prof. Ranjit Singh Rangeela. He is a Sikh. On the way to the Institute, as he hummed *dohas* from the Gurubani, he first pointed out a mosque for me to notice, and then a Rama temple. When I asked him if the mosque and the temple were old, he replied, “That doesn’t matter, does it?” As soon as we reached his office, he played for me a moving piece on the shenai by Bismilla Khan, which he said had been specially composed by Khan Sahib for Naina Devi. This conversation, I should add, was conducted, quite unselfconsciously in English, Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi. What Prof. Rangeela had created for me, with a few quick gestures, was the civilisational habitat of the Indian subcontinent of which I am the inheritor and in which I participate. It seems to me that, as a translator, it is this habitat, which I have been trying to share with others, even as I have been trying to define it, and given the times we live in, defend it. I should add that the two writers whose works I have dealt with extensively in these lectures – Manto and Dharamvir Bharati – have been doing precisely that – defining, defending and rédeeming the cultural spaces we inhabit which have been fissured rather badly over the past sixty or so years of our sub-continental history.

I should like to take this opportunity to thank friends and colleagues without whose help and support these lectures could not have been written: Venkat Rao and Mahasweta Sengupta who generously lent me books on translation theory; Rustam Singh, the editor of *Hindi: Language, Discourse, Writing*, who published early drafts of two of these lectures; Ashok Vajpai, who invited me to participate in a seminar on translation theory; and K. Satchidanandan, the Secretary of the Sahitya Akademi, who encouraged me to work on the translation of *Andha Yug*.

I should, finally, like to acknowledge the editorial skills of my wife, Vasundara, for without them I would make many more grammatical mistakes than I usually make.

Alok Bhalla

July 17, 2003



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LECTURE 1

The Place Of Translation In A Literary Habitat

“The great pest of speech is frequency of translation.”

- Samuel Johnson¹

“The writer who is content to destroy is on a plane with the writer who is content to translate. Both are parasites.”

- Wallace Stevens²

1

Every time I am invited to a seminar on translation studies, I am both tempted and panic-stricken. I recall the long days spent in reading theories of translation and find myself facing, once again, blank intellectual spaces caused by my own incomprehension of theory and lack of sophistication. Each theorist of translation, I remember, brought his/her own “horizon of expectation” to a translated text, and everyone wanted to give a “call to action”³ against this or that practice of translators in order to save the original from a variety of violations. The translator, I thought, was always the object of *jehadi* rage of the theorists who insisted that there must be some fundamental rules for translation. And they all believed that the translator was nearly always a guilty thing who had to be surprised as he either did or did not reveal, deform, explain, improve, expand, rationalise, eroticise, clarify, infect, simplify, defer, ennoble, rewrite, nativise, destroy, exoticise, feminise, domesticate, minoritise, foreignise, impoverish, colonise, subvert or misrepresent the meaning of the original text. And to confuse things further, one theorist even argued that every time one writes critically about another text one is doing nothing but translating. We are told, for instance, that Helen Vendler was actually translating, not interpreting, Keats’s “Ode to Autumn” in her analysis of the poem, just as Keats himself was translating scenes from his own earlier poems into the images of his Ode, and, in turn, the season of autumn was translating the earth into “mellow fruitfulness.”⁴

At the end of all my theoretical reading, I often wondered if under the vast network of words spun-out with impressive complexity and skill, there was only emptiness; that theories of translation, especially the more post-modern ones, were another way of thinking about the absurdity and the futility of being in the world. Should a translator, I remember asking myself, be made to carry such a heavy ontological burden? Should he not protest, and cry out, "No, I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was I meant to be?" Is he not, like Wordsworth's poet, merely a common and an ordinary man, wrestling with words and meanings, and speaking to other common and ordinary human beings? I must, however, confess that my despondency after reading theorists of translation has always been accompanied by a sense of guilt both about my own lack of theoretical erudition and the absence of any "dogma driven" (Tagore's phrase) convictions as a translator. And I have found myself making yet another effort - always against my better instincts - to reread the theoretical texts I had already struggled with earlier or read the ones I know I should read for my own salvation as an intellectual. But, invariably, at the end of all my academic effort, and contrary to what Yeats meant by an intellectual quest, my mind, like "a long-legged fly upon a stream," merely hovers over misty nothingness. And overcome by despair, I begin to wonder if the act of translation is really not about imagining another language and hence imagining other forms of living and being; and if a translator is no better than a ventriloquist's dummy who has no language of his own and whose truth is his silence.

Initially, theories of translation seem make sense. They are even exciting to read for, instead of information, they offer sophisticated wit. I even find myself gracefully acknowledging that, even if my own practice as translator might have been naïve or simple-minded, I have been troubled by the similar questions and have sometimes even been tempted to offer similar solutions. There is pleasure in the acknowledgement and recognition of agreement with others who have thought about the necessity of translation and its difficulties. After all, my own claim to intellectual cosmopolitanism depends upon the labour of a community of translators, as does my claim that in order to recognize our selfhood we need to understand the ways in which all of us belong to the human plurality.⁵ But soon after, I realise that theoretical reading inevitably becomes contentious and factitious. I find myself in a nightmare of words, prescriptions and the ruins of logic. I am bewildered.

First by the stern lawgivers who lay down scientific rules for translation which tell me, a bit tautologically, that I must notice every shadow and trace of every word and, then, by the narcissism of the deconstructionists who assert that words only reflect other words in a sad and endless regression into nothingness. Translation, thereby, becomes a descent into a labyrinth of dictionaries - not the enchanted labyrinth of stories Jorge Luis Borges leads us into - and every syllable ever recorded in time carries within it an echo of some other syllable from another time. Finally, irritated, bewildered and depressed, I reach out for a line from one of the letters Robert Frost wrote in his old age and use it as a talisman: "I am weary of all these considerations."

It is heartening to note that of late, even amongst the theorists of translation, there are some who are as tired as I am of theoretical wars which take place more often amongst theorists of language than amongst translators. They are trying to assert once again that the act of translation is a kind of imaginative and existentially serious dialogue which happens because, as the philosopher Jurgen Habermas says, we assume that "linguistically-articulated worldviews are interwoven with everyday forms of life." A translator lives amongst words which have a human voice and a social purpose; a translator is a person who invites us to establish a relationship with a culture and a community, a life of the mind and a society of deeds, which are markedly different from the civilizational history to which one belongs.

2

I had always assumed, with the assuredness of the innocent, that translation enabled one to make the difficult effort to know the other. It was with the help of translation, I was sure, that one fell into conversation with the other and so reaffirmed one's existence in the world beside the other. Still influenced by the concerns of the humanists - concerns which, in our times, seem like phantom shadows in a fragile glass - I believed that translation was a way of renewing the old dream of *communitas* where the self could behold itself in the other's eyes (or in "one's brother's eyes" as Blake would have said), and so be reassured of its similarity to and difference from the other. I should add here that I understood *communitas* as that condition where human beings, unbounded by conventions or sanctions or prejudices of social

structures, succeeded in establishing a basic or a primal 'I and Thou' relationship with each other, and confronted each other, not as players in melodramas of confrontation, but as 'human totals', as integral beings who recognizably shared the same humanity. The act of translation, then, was a way of creating a habitat where other *samskaras* - other myths and longings - different from those of the isolated self could also resonate with meaning.

Now, however, I have to contend with recent trends in European and American criticism, which argue (renewing, perhaps, Dr Johnson's suspicion about translations in a different idiom and within an angst-ridden metaphysics) that translation, far from being a knowledge-making activity, is a threat to meaning and knowledge. Taking its cue, perhaps, from Arthur Rimbaud's sad declaration, "I am always the other," recent scholarship has surrounded the word 'translation' with anxious and brooding scepticism. Critics like Walter Benjamin, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Lawrence Venuti and others, writing in varying shades of grey foreboding and differing registers of irony, declare that translation is an impossibility (a 'necessary impossibility,' as Derrida would have it), and that, if critically undertaken, translation makes the self aware of the blank spaces which separate it from the other; that translation is only a charade of meaning-making by the self and always an act of betrayal of the other.

Thus, Patrick Mahoney, moving across multilingual etymologies, wittily hears in the word 'translation' echoes of words like 'transport', 'transference', 'entrance' and, finally, '*traduttore*' and 'traitor.' If this cross-border tracking of verbal movement, which spies a relation between translation and treason, is right then translation is a dangerous James Bondish game of contraband cultural goods and betrayal, and the ignorant translator of words deserves, as Maurice Blanchot, in another place insists, a "death-sentence" which would release him quite mercifully from "the fatal solitude of writing" (*The Space of Literature*). Of course, the only other options for a translator-turned-traitor, who does not want to die a sudden death, is either to adopt the strategy of the master spy and remain stubbornly silent or to imitate the master strategist Odysseus and, refusing to divulge his real name, call himself Nemo - Nobody.

In a brilliant series of essays on translation, often punningly entitled as *The Ear of the Other*, "Des Tours de Babel," or *Dissemination*, Jacques Derrida thinks that since humanity is 'condemned' to a multiplicity languages⁶

each one of which is a fragment of the original, it is difficult to believe that translation can contribute something which is meaningfully communicable in the literary or social habitat, or clarify the ways in which the self can establish a unity with the world outside. He makes a series of shifting analogies between the act of translation and the Biblical story about the tower of Babel, Plato's 'Pharmakos', and Freud's theories of hysteria and phobic disorders. In an attempt to show why translation is both impossible and necessary, Derrida says that a translator is like Plato's apothecary who knows that in his pharmacy he can not, with any certainty, label any potion so as to "distinguish the medicine from the poison, the good from the evil, the true from the false...the vital from the mortal..."⁷

Each of these analogies is used to suggest that human beings are tragically fated to enact forever the hopeless task of remembering and forgetting a pure kernel of language, a primal intactness of being, a pre-historic feeling of belonging to a place called home to which they once belonged — the "terrible necessity," as he puts it, "to forget that there is nothing to forget, that there has been nothing to forget".⁸ Unfortunately, we can think about a pure of language only after it has been shattered into a multiplicity of languages; we can remember that we once had an integrated self only after we have become aware of its disintegration; and, we can begin to dream of *communitas* only after we have been exiled from the original habitat.

But for Plato, the assumption that there was a changeless and eternal realm was a "moral need,"⁹ and the main purpose of knowledge, including that of the apothecary's, was to direct all intellectual energies towards its discovery. All the Platonic dialogues in the market square about language and truth are conducted not to reveal the abyss beneath the feet, but to show everyone that it is always possible to take small steps in the ordinary realm towards truth. Derrida's translator, in contrast, is doomed to stand eternally with suspended step, in a sort of 'paralysed motion', at the liminal border that separates the original, the pure language - what Derrida calls "the being-language of language"¹⁰ - from its infinite fragments. He asserts that the plurality of languages have a kinship with each other which makes translation possible. But, simultaneously, he argues that, since before or beyond these languages there is a 'pure' language, it is the "messianic"¹¹ task of the translator to push each linguistic fragment towards reconstituting the original

wholeness, a task which is simultaneously necessary and hopelessly impossible.

Through a process, which Derrida calls "associative confusion"¹² (a phrase which is at once clear and mystifying), he slides away from the sacred to the terrible necessity of earthly law and finally to the self's inner labyrinths, and calls upon the works of Freud to suggest that in the relation between the original text and its translation there is always a slippage, which is similar to the failure of the analysand to make a complete 'transference' of all his psychological associations to the analyst. The best the analysand can hope for in the process of the 'transportation' of all the images in his psyche is a *tranche-fert*, a series of "false connections," and he is condemned to live in a semiotically blind space that separates him from the analyst. All translations, he says, are "interminable" approximations of the original idiom.¹³ One could, perhaps, imitating the punning manoeuvres of Derrida, say that for him there is no erotic charge between the original and its translation, no copula, no copulation, and, hence, to use a word Frank Kermode used to describe the desire of all readers, there is no *pleroma*, no sense of fulfilment.¹⁴ A translator, in this account, may be in love with the original, but to misuse T.S. Eliot, his "love is always the love of the wrong thing." No matter what strategies a translator employs, language always betrays him, and the translated work slips and falls into the 'rift' or the 'fault-line' that exists between the original language and the language into which it is translated. Shifting his metaphor, Derrida thinks of the translated text and the original as antagonists lost in the infinite endgame of chess, where any move that a translator may make is simultaneously wrong and futile, possible and impossible. Since Samuel Beckett has been invoked here, one could, perhaps, carry the invocation further and say that for Derrida, in the final analysis (the psychoanalytic pun is intended), both the original and its translation turn out to be *Texts for Nothing* (the title of a major collection of writings by Beckett). And to carry on with Beckett, all a translator can do is to say to himself: "Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better."¹⁵

While Derrida still thinks of translation as a ludic play of difference, *différance* and deferral, in which, despite the inevitable tragedy, there is still the possibility of wit as a sort of saving grace, De Man deploys the metaphor of chess (i.e. endgame) and asserts that translation is yet another move in a

game whose meaning is always annihilated, and where, as one moves across the graveyard of words, one discovers that there never was any meaning to start with. He begins by quoting Derrida's argument that a translation is a game with "Being" on a "bottomless chessboards." As if this were not dreadful enough, De Man, with his usual nihilistic grimness, argues that translation, like all other human gestures, "kills the original, by discovering that the original was already dead."¹⁶ Unlike the humanists, who think that language is the product of human beings who use it to make meaning,¹⁷ de Man believes that language is "not human, it is God-given: it is the *logos*, as that which God gives to man. Not specifically to man, but God gives, as such."¹⁸ Pushing the argument further, he asserts that the relation between the original language that God gives and the languages that human beings speak is "inhuman."¹⁹ In order to speak about the Being of things, including language, and its relation to the shattered and contaminated world ordinary human beings inhabit, he invokes Walter Benjamin's famous metaphor of the 'amphora' – the Kabbalistic vessel, which in its unbroken form, represents the plenitude of the original.²⁰ For Benjamin, our historical world is formed when the vessel breaks and the oneness of Being is scattered. A writer, any writer in any language, can only speak about the fragments of the amphora for he cannot ever have the knowledge of the whole unbroken vessel. And if he ever succeeds in putting together all the fragments, he cannot restore the vessel to its original unbroken shape, but can only recreate something resembling the original out of all the broken parts. It follows, then, that the translator, who, by definition, can only have a fragmentary understanding of the original work which is in itself constructed out of the fragments of language, is always engaged in the task of translating "the fragment of a fragment," and, hence, in "breaking the fragment" further.²¹ If this is right, then de Man's translator is a tomb-raider who is perpetually busy dismembering the 'corpus' of texts so that he can satisfy his necrophilic desires in some literary night of the living dead.²²

I hope that by now you will sympathise with me if I confess that by the time I finished reading these phantasmal texts I began to feel sorry for myself. Euro-American criticism, it seemed to me, was now a new *Malleus Maleficarum* (or, *The Witch's Hammer* - a text written in the fifteenth century by Heinrich Kramer and James Sprenger in the days of Pope Innocent VII to catch witches) subtly crafted to trap someone like me who had already translated too much. Before I read the post-modern critics, I didn't know that

I was so deeply entangled in a strange semiotic crime for which there was no atonement. After I read them, I suddenly realized, like one of the ordinary victims in a Hitchcock film, that, unknowingly, I already knew too much and had been a bit of a simpleton for revealing the secrets of a culture to anyone who had cared to listen to my translated tales. But then, just as I was ready to surrender all that I had known earlier and give in to despair, I recalled a few motley words of the Fool's song in *King Lear*, and found there a companion - a fellow fool - who could teach me a few talismanic lines. "Hey nony, nony," I said to myself, I am but a poor, naïve translator who should follow the Fool's advice and 'let go of my hold of the great wheel of theory that runs down a hill, lest it break my neck with following.' I translate texts and read translations because, for me, both are *continuous forms of discovering other modes of knowing; translations are the achievements of the ordinary where the conversation of the self with the other is always possible*. And so now like the wise Fool in *Lear*, I can always say with some confidence:

"The fool will stay,
And let the wise fly.
The knave turns fool that runs away,
The fool no knave, perdy."

- *King Lear*, II, iv, lines, 79-82.

3

This leads me to assert that no language is untranslatable. A translator may find that there are some texts for which it is easier to find another language in which they can feel at home – another language, which already has the ideas, words, idioms, or rhythms, which respond to the experiences, however complex, the original texts, seek to convey. Otherwise how can people who speak a different language ever be able to acknowledge the pain of others or their joy, respond to others with magnanimous regard or with mean spiritedness, repose their faith in others or betray them? The translatability of languages is a part of the comedy of being human. There may, of course, be other texts that are more complexly articulated or more extensively and intricately woven into the texture of a particular culture. Such texts may

require, what Kwame Anthony Appiah calls, a “thick translation” – a translation which enables one to be aware of and explore cultural or historical differences.²³ The argument of untranslatability is sometimes based on the assumption that words are like the Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* – they fade the moment the translator’s gaze falls upon them leaving behind only the traces of their presence. And, at other times, the suggestion that texts are impossible to translate is based on a tautology. The argument is that eminent works do not record the poverty of the contingent world, but let thought roam in ever-widening circles, searching for ways of making this world into a habitation shared with others; the questing mind makes the infinite seem like an “achievement of the ordinary.” But, since no one has ever disputed this – not even translators – it is difficult to see why so much of the effort of translation theory is spent on spinning verbal labyrinths out of this assumption. Whenever I find myself being drawn into one these cul-de-sacs, I recall the following commonsensical statement by Plotinus which St. Augustine used to keep by himself to draw comfort from: “He is no great man who thinks it a great thing that sticks and stones should fall, and that man, who must die, should die.”²⁴

If languages were untranslatable, then we would have either been living in a world of cacophonies or have become hopelessly mute in a world of silences. Anything that can be imagined, known or said in one language can be translated into any other language. I take my cue from the Hebraic tradition in which the original plenitude of the Word of Jehovah was ‘translated’ or transfigured into a variety of things and the “cognate splendour” (the phrase is from a poem by Richard Wilbur) of the languages of men.²⁵ I need to point out here that this version of God’s creative joyousness is quite distinct from Derrida’s JHWH who, in anger, creates fragments of languages so as to create confusion among the tribes of men and “annuls the gift of tongues.”²⁶ In the context of my present meditation on the creative act of translation, one can, perhaps, reformulate the Jehovahist tradition and, cleansing it of its brooding narcissism, say that, because God could imagine languages he could imagine forms of life.²⁷ The original, confident and creative utterance of God (“And God said...”) immediately splintered into an infinite variety of alphabets, words, sentences, grammars, languages and cultures. And since, in the beginning, when God spoke the words light, sun, moon, earth, stars, water, birds, beasts, fish, man, woman there were no concrete

referents for any of them, it was His act of speech which brought them into existence.²⁸ If, mythically at least, words “call” the world into existence (the Biblical word for this “calling out” is *kara* and its equivalent in another language is *Koran*), then it is difficult to believe that a translator cannot find the equivalences for words, tone, rhythms or structures of texts imagined in one language in any other language. Unless, of course, one is willing to assert that it is possible to fabulate some things only in one language and not in any other. This position would be morally and politically difficult to maintain. One will, for the sake of our democratic and ethical selfhood, have to argue, instead, that the possibility of translation is inherent in God’s original utterance.

Men may have lost their Edenic confidence, but they fell into the grace of words and so acquired “the creative omnipotence of language.”²⁹ The paradox is that, *even as men fell into languages* and lost the intuitive sense of being a part of the divine, they acquired a *two-fold power*. They found the shadow of Jehovah in language, but instead of trying to recover their old and lost paradise, they realized that they could create, through the ‘word-honouring’ rituals of friendship, knowledge and work, a new world of imagination and culture out of language and work. This means that men could simultaneously remain *devoted* to the original Word, and yet extend, enrich or supplement it with their memories, experiences, dilemmas and solutions. Their ability to translate their knowledge of things into the languages they spoke may not have enabled them to recover fullness of the original Word, but it made it possible for them to replenish their world with the eloquence of speech. Through translations of what each of them knew, they could draw the original word *into* their conversations and, at the same time, test their own claims to reason or better political sense or greater moral clarity. Lest this sounds too idealistic to our sceptical ears, let me quickly add that I am quite aware of the fact that in Eden dialogue was the Serpent’s gift, and since he spoke with a forked tongue, along with “knowledge and wisdom,” he also showed us “the possibility of lies and dissimulation.”³⁰ But, then, without Satan’s dialogic intervention, how could our stories and our translations have had a beginning? After all, God had worked hard enough for seven days to create the world, and having declared it to be a goodly place, taken a well-earned sabbatical!

4

What this means for the practice of translation, I think, is that a good translator of *significant texts* does *not* try to *imitate* the original; he does not offer a mirror reflection of the original which records the likeness of the original but is doomed to remain only a phantom. By 'significant texts' I mean - following Hans-Georg Gadamar - texts which speak to us tirelessly, which constantly ask questions, offer possible answers, suggest different ways of looking at the world again and again, and so stay with us to become partners in a conversation that we conduct either with ourselves or with others about questions that matter. And questions that matter are questions that we don't fully understand but which insist on being perpetually reformulated for greater clarity. They are questions that we can only answer partially, and that require another effort at posing the question and finding an answer.³¹ Instead, a translator *crafts a new work* which respects the *integrity* of the original (this is the minimum that all translations must have) and yet exists beside it, on its own terms, and sometimes even challenges the claim to priority of the original (the English Bible is a good case in point). In order to do so, a translator tries to find a language and a rhythm, which will enable the original thought to emerge in the language of the translation, guide the reader to think through the ideas being refined and feel the emotions being described. Only then will the translation acquire a cultural meaning for people who have no access to the language of the original text and so become a part of their realms of aesthetic and moral being.

5

If no translation is a faithful likeness of the original, it is entirely legitimate for each age to have its own translations of Homer (from Chapman and Pope to Fitzgerald and Lattimore), or of Dante (from Carey to Singleton and Pinsky), or of the Bible and the Gita, and, dare I say, the Koran which is forever wary of satanic verses. For each new translation of a significant or eminent text creates a place for itself in our *literary habitat* because it reflects the expectations, conventions or propositions of the times. In none of these, or in other similar cases, is one tempted to ask if the translation is faithful to

the original, for one acknowledges that the mechanics of faithfulness in the translations of significant texts can turn the loveliest of phrases and the profoundest of ideas into dull prattle. The right test for the translation of any of these eminent texts is whether the new text crafted in another language is counterfeit or no; whether it respects the integrity of the original, and at the same time urges us to think in new ways about the cultural or intellectual resources that lie beyond the boundaries of one's own mental maps. The most important test, however, is whether the presence of the text, in its new incarnation in a different language, seems to be *utterly inevitable* in the *literary habitat* of the language into which it has been translated (this point is in part derived from Walter Benjamin)³². It is difficult, for example, to imagine a European literary history without the translations of Homer or the *Arabian Nights*. Indeed one can move backwards and forwards along the chronological history of any literary culture and find examples of an intimate and reciprocal relationship between significant translations and eminent writers.

I am suggesting that one of the preconditions for the formation of any civil, political and literary habitat is the possibility of translation; just as one of the preconditions for translation is the existence of civil, political and literary habitats. Indeed, it is because of the human gift of translation that a respectful civility between different ways of constructing reality and valuing the things of the world by diverse communities can be maintained.³³ I am, of course, not suggesting that because we can translate other languages we can evade conflicts, grudges, deceptions or sorrow. We do not live in transcendental paradises, but "in the midst of life,"³⁴ where action, feeling and beliefs of people can always come into conflict with each other. But, I am suggesting, that because there is a vast 'community of translated texts,' we begin to see others as "social beings" like ourselves "puzzling out, in time of great moral difficulty, what might be, for us, the best way to live..."³⁵ This goes against the grain of a large body of contemporary translation theory that claims that translation is impossible, hence, that any coherent social formation too is impossible. One can find in Paul de Man, for instance, a radical distrust of language and communicative societies. Given that the original meaning can never be fully recovered, a translation, he says, must concede even before it begins that its desire for communication and understanding must always be defeated. For critics like de Man, no translation can escape from being entrapped in a circle of silence, for its meaning is forever lost in "the bottomless

depths of language.” Therefore, far from renewing language and extending its meanings, a translation can only conduct a post-mortem of language; and, of course, far from helping men to recreate or renovate a social order, it can only lead them further into distraction and distrust.³⁶ It is worth noticing that de Man’s version is similar to that of Hobbes who, too, thinks that both language and society are dangerously untrustworthy and can only offer a treacherous ground for understanding and community making. After all, Hobbes’ famous formulation in *Leviathan*, that nature has condemned every man to live in fear of every man is, in part, derived from his belief that words are untrustworthy and, unless they are carefully ordered, man “will find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twiggs; the more he struggles, the more belimed.”³⁷

6

It has been nobody’s brief that languages are so completely transparent that meaning can be transported from one linguistic structure to another or from one civilizational condition to another, without change, or loss, or even enrichment. It does not, however, follow from this that transferral of meaning from one language to another is impossible, or that all languages are totally opaque to each other. Indeed, I suspect that the idea that words are opaque is either platitudinous or merely rhetorical; an empty gesture, which sometimes seems to disguise, beneath its melodramatic excess, an elitist rejection of others as creatures worthy of a conversation, and, at other times, a pessimistic assessment of man’s continuing desire to find a common ground to stand on.

It is true that we can never understand each other completely, but it would be a fatal error to assume that we should either do so or entertain the desire to do so. Indeed, it would be tragic for human relationships if we were fully transparent to each other. Not only would our languages then acquire the hard certainty of machines, but also we would become helplessly available to each other for use and coercive manipulation. Such clear visibility, as we know, is the dream of every totalitarian thinker. What saves us as autonomous individuals is precisely the untranslatable residue in each of us, which is inaccessible even to ourselves. At the end of his long investigation into the

mysterious selfhood of the main protagonist, the journalist in Orson Wells's film, *Citizen Kane*, wisely concludes, "I don't think any word can explain a man's life." It is, indeed, a blessing that after the blinding clarity of the first words of God ("Let there be light..."), the rest of our lives with each other have retained some of the enigma of being human. It is this degree of ambiguity that persuades us to both conduct a dialogue with ourselves and engage in a conversation with those who are different.

7

Another consequence of the assertion that languages *are translatable* is that while each language retains its distinctive characteristic and reveals its own unique entanglement with the complex acts of world-making, it also ceases to exist in a pure, enchanted space of its own, free from all the influences of historical change. Instead, each language exists beside another language in a continuum. It is possible, then, to imagine that each language so borrows from, distorts, transforms or slides into any other language that every society is continuously engaged in the transformative process of world making and knowledge-making. One can, for example, think of the way in which Hindi/Urdu/Punjabi/English have existed side by side over a long period and have utterly changed, through their co-mingling, the world-views reflected in each, and opened up spaces of knowledge for each other which they may not have found in their isolation.

Thus, saint-poets of India like Kabir, Nanak or Farid do not exist in the solitude of their own languages. They take, without self-consciousness or apology, words from Urdu, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, Punjabi or Rajasthani to sing about their Gods. They wander freely through languages in the same way as they make their own distinctive pilgrim-paths across the vast territories of the Indian subcontinent. It is, therefore, not surprising that for Nanak the word (or *shabd* or *boli*) which stands for God's command is *hukum* taken from Arabic, and the word for divine grace is *prashad* from Devnagari. I should like to add that the visual translation of his ministry too arises out of his realization that his own sense of inward holiness is a result of his location within a plurality of languages and traditions. That is why he wears the saffron robes of a Hindu ascetic and the turban of a Sufi fakir.

One major political and literary advantage of thinking about languages as being translatable and hopelessly contaminated is that one can set-up easy defences against the arrogance of linguistic chauvinists and tribal purists, and refuse to take cognizance of the snivelling defensiveness of the 'nativists.' Claude Levi-Strauss may be right in asserting that for every tribal group concerned about its safety in a hostile world the notion of "Mankind stops at the boundaries of the tribe, the linguistic group, sometimes even of the village..."³⁸ Beyond that boundary there are spaces occupied by barbarians, phantoms and apparitions against whom there are taboos, ritual chants and talismans. Maybe, translators can help us cross those boundaries of suspicion and make the very act of boundary-making more neighbourly.

8

There are, however, moments when the movement from one linguistic or cultural boundary to another comes up against words and ideas, which do seem to be difficult to translate. I am thinking of culture-specific words like *dharma*, *nirvana* or *catharsis*. These words, nevertheless, do not bring us to the abyss of incomprehension. They only call for a greater degree of "hermeneutic alertness" on the part of the translator. And, inevitably, his *absorbedness* (a favourite word of Ezra Pound's) with the word or idea enables him to find a kind of solution, however tentative, so that the process of understanding, which seemed to stop, can begin again. This may help us transcend many of the cantankerous literary and critical battles we sometimes get involved in.

To those who say that translation is not possible, who negate the possibility of conversation, and hence the very selfhood of others, I should like to quote the following lines from Emerson's "Self-Reliance": "Well, most men have bound their eyes with one or another handkerchief and attached themselves to some of these communities of opinion. This conformity makes them not false in a few particulars, authors of a few lies, but false in all particulars. Their very truth is not quite true. Their two is not the real two; their four is not the real four; so that every word they say chagrins us, and we know not where to begin to set them right."

9

Finally, let me end with a small piece of advice and prayer for the translator because, in this post-modern world which is now playful and now grim, he is a poor and vulnerable creature on whom we should not place too much faith in leading us to the fullness of meaning and being we may desire. A translator is only a small craftsman who uses the words he knows to give his respect to and reveal, on our behalf and for us, other ways of knowledge-making and other betrayals than our own, other ideas and beliefs, other mansions and fields, pathways and forests, ruins, denials and sexual longings, nostalgias, exiles, cruelties, poems, stories, hopes, pilgrimages, ecstasies, and disenchantments. The advice is from Emerson's aptly-entitled essay, "Self-Help": "Leave your theory, as Joseph his coat in the hand of the harlot, and flee."³⁹ And the prayer is a variation of a line from one of the Psalms:

So teach us, O Lord,
To translate our texts
That we may apply
Our hearts into wisdom...

LECTURE 2

The Politics of Translation: Manto's Partition Stories in English

On one level translating Saadat Hasan Manto into English is not very difficult. As a storyteller he never retreats from the complexity of lived experience to find easy refuge in political posturing or moral and religious sermonising. That is why the style of his best stories, devoid of all metaphoric excess and sentimental inflections, is always precise, bare-boned and conversational. Most of his narrators are either hard-drinking and whoring men who live in cities which have neither space for graciousness nor time for romance, or are men who have seen so much horror that they can only offer a disenchanted and cynical vision of the world. Their descriptions, ironic and cold-eyed, seem to be authentic versions of life at a particular historical moment because they have the feel of the real and the pitilessness of stone. It should not, therefore, be impossible for a translator to find verbal and cultural equivalents for his stories in English.

Structurally, Manto's tales are idiosyncratic but should not make a translator anxious. Manto often disrupts the linear and chronological flow of his stories by using the same kind of parenthetical interruptions, digressions or elisions that are common to all ordinary conversations. Since he is not conducting political and ethical arguments, he doesn't worry about constructing well-argued paragraphs whose internal coherence is essential to convince us of the truth of some abstract proposition. Instead, with the fine cunning of a master storyteller, at times he disrupts the narrative to increase suspense or breaks the story's spell to remind us that life always frustrates our longing for completion; at other times, he offers different narrative possibilities within the same story and invites us to puzzle them out or merely writes a fragment which emerges from silence like a scream. That is why, his stories seem to have the structural sharpness of barbed-wires and broken shards, and like them they can wound those who are not alert to their existence. Instead of being problematic, the narrative quirkiness of his stories ought to be exciting for any contemporary translator who is conscious of their jaggedness and fissures, their sudden shifts and silences, their blank spaces and absences.

There is, however, one aspect of Manto's literary intelligence which can prove fatal for any translator of his stories. Manto's language may be economical, but it has the sting and precision of a whiplash. An English translation of his stories may be accurate, but may still fail to capture the grating roughness of his diction, the sardonic irony of his images and the harsh rhythms of his prose. In order to be effective, it would have to cause the same nightmarish pain, the same sharp lacerations on the reader's soul as Manto's Urdu original. Otherwise, Manto can appear to be either sentimental, or merely obscene and cynical, instead being a writer who has a deeply troubled, but profoundly moral, concern with human experiences and actions in a world which has lost its political sense and social reason.

Khalid Hasan is the best-known and the well-regarded of the translators of Manto into English. Unfortunately, his collection, *Mottled Dawn: Fifty Sketches and Stories of Partition*, by Manto, is deeply flawed.⁴⁰ There are two serious problems with the book. One, its translations are highly inaccurate and disfigure the original. Two, it has no recognisable editorial policy. The result is a lazy and an unimaginative book which fails to deal with the range of Manto's responses to the partition. If his initial response to the partition was that of disgust at the brutality, he later tried to make a more historically self-conscious attempt to understand its causes, and then find a way towards a different kind of politics which could assert that citizenship is the right of anyone who has lived for long within certain boundaries and feels at home within its cultural spaces.

Mottled Dawn is, with one minor change, an unrevised reprint of *Partition: Stories and Sketches* published by Penguin in 1991.⁴¹ It contains only one new text — "Mere Sahib" (Jinnah Sahib). Otherwise, the new edition retains all the problems of the previous version. Hasan makes no attempt to explain his selection of stories nor does he offer any explanation for his radical transformation of their structures into their new avatars. Thus, for example, we are not told why the story "Naya Kanoon" (A New Constitution) has been included even though it has nothing to do with the partition. The story was written in 1937, a few years before the demand for Pakistan was raised in 1940, and refers to the promulgation of the India Act of 1936. What makes the choice strange is the fact that well-known pieces about the partition like "Gurmukh Singh ki Vasihat," "Ramkhilavan" and "Shahay," find no place in the volume. Since the selection is obviously whimsical, it is not

surprising that Hasan chooses not to translate Manto's later and more complex stories. He doesn't, for example, include "1919 Ke Ek Baat," a difficult and bleak tale in which Manto seems to conclude that, despite the presence of Gandhi, the foolish and the brutal characterised every instance of our nationalist past.⁴² Nor does he include tales like "Fauda Haramda" and "Shah Dauley Da Chuha," where Manto suggests that a disparate group of exiles, who have neither shared myths nor a common language, can never come together to form a nation; carrying nothing more than their different memories, they can only live in the half-lit spaces of nostalgia.

What is editorially most puzzling, however, is the manner in which twenty-eight of the brief and fragmentary sketches included in the volume are presented. Hasan doesn't mention the fact that they form a part of a strange and unique text called *Siyah Hashiye* (Black Margins), which is actually made up of thirty-two pieces designed to be read together. There is, of course, no reason given for the exclusion of the remaining fragments. Hasan's procedure is misleading and damaging, because Manto deliberately composes a splintered text in order to convey his terrified sense that the partition was a time of phantasmagorias. All the thirty-two pieces in *Siyah Hashiye* together create a nightmare landscape of random violence; a scandalous world where victims and predators interchange places endlessly and unpredictably. To present them as unrelated and individual sketches is to rob them of their cumulative irony and their abrasive force.

If Hasan as an editor offers us a Manto whose writings on the partition are considerably diluted, as a translator he *recreates* for us a Manto who is substantially compromised and damaged as a writer. Not only does he give to Manto's stories English titles which have no recognisable relationship with the original ones in Urdu, he also dismembers and scramble their structures, deletes paragraphs, summarises significant dialogues, omits details about characters, transforms long monologues into comfortable paragraphs, converts broken sentences and hesitant speech into smoothly flowing prose, and adds information about Islamic history and the formation of Pakistan for *kafirs*, so as to make Manto both into a communal partisan and a weak storyteller.⁴³ Hasan doesn't trust Manto. He forgets that Manto, at his best, knows the measure of a story and is always cautious not to reduce the difficult craft of storytelling into one of the duller forms of politics and theology. Manto's mode of narration is not separable from his vision of our moral

condition during the partition; it is rather a part of his exploration of the social and psychological conditions which can lead all of us into evil. Hasan's violations of Manto's narrative strategies so distort the originals as to nearly succeed in making his sardonic and complex responses to the partition seem ordinary and predictable. Manto survives the translation because his stories are powerful and disturbing. There ought to be, however, *a minimum ethic for every translator*.

Hasan's translation of some of the brief pieces in *Siyah Hashiye* provides examples of the problems with his method. Manto's text is made up of a series of instances of atrocity; each new atrocity merely replaces the previous one and is equally unprecedented. Given the fact that Manto wants to record the randomness of terror, it is obvious that these brief tales cannot be arranged in any recognisable order. Yet they must be read together, for only then can they create a phantasmagoric landscape where there is neither reason nor hope. Many of the fragmentary pieces are deliberately constructed out of broken sentences or simple words so as to suggest that they have been carefully incised on the page — like epitaphs on tombstones. Their brevity of form and their restrained tone are continuously threatened by the frenzy of the events described. One is forced to read them with slow and painful deliberation. Only then does one notice how single words or sentences fragments in one line crumble into the words in the next line, before finally collapsing into sneering laughter or horrified silence or screams. Hasan's prose translation, without Manto's careful lineation, in which words simply slide into one another as in any conventional sentence, erases the spasmodic quality of these tales, and, thereby, denies them of their vituperative quality.

Take, for instance, the text entitled "Sorry." In the Urdu version the original is arranged as follows:

Sorry

Churi
 paet chak karti hui
 naaf ke neeche tak chali gai izarband kat gaya.
 Churi maarnevale ke
 munh se
 dafatan
 kalma-i-taassuf nikla

“Chi. Chi, Chi...mishtake ho gaya.”

(*Dastavez*, vol. 2, p.304)⁴⁴

Hasan translates it as follows:

Mishtake

Ripping the belly cleanly, the knife moved in a straight line down the midriff, in the process slashing the cord which held the man's pyjamas in place.

The man with the knife took one look and exclaimed regretfully, 'Oh no! ... Mishtake!' (p. 207)

It is amusing to note that Hasan 'translates' the original title "Sorry." What is involved here is more than an error of judgment. By changing the title of the story - "Mishtake" - Hasan suggests that Manto is doing nothing more than casually recording a grotesque incident as an example of the quirkiness of those fateful days. The change, unfortunately, turns a grim story into an anecdote. Surely, it is obvious from the careful manner in which the lineation of the text has been crafted, that Manto is not merely taking a note of a singularly absurd event, but is trying to draw attention to an infinite series of mindless and anonymous killings which have made life into a nightmare. The new title suggests that Hasan's attitude towards the text is flippant. Indeed, one suspects that Hasan changes the title partly because he wants to snigger rather arrogantly at the lumpenisation of language, and partly because he thinks that Manto wants to point to the murderous propensities of the Punjabis in order to affirm ethnic stereotypes (the inability of many Punjabis to pronounce 's' has been the subject of countless jokes).

Manto's title, however, is quite deliberately chosen. It is rather unbecoming of a translator to reduce the text, which is a serious attempt at analysing human behaviour during times dominated by mob enthusiasm and misrule, to the level of a racial slur. One of the characteristic features of Manto's stories about the partition is that they *refuse to pass communally or ethnically charged judgments*. That is why Manto either erases all religious or regional markers, or makes one uncomfortable with them wherever they occur. His attitude towards the partition, and of the capacity of human beings

to deal with crises, is utterly cynical. He is convinced that there are times when appeals to reason or morality can do nothing to prevent human beings — Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs equally — from becoming murderers and living like fools. The title, “Sorry,” therefore, seems to have been deliberately chosen. On the one hand, its formality is mocked by the coarseness of the last exclamation of the killer. On the other hand, it warns us not to snigger at the assassin’s inability to pronounce a simple word, lest we forget his victim and become accomplices in the slaughter. If we have to retain our humanity, we have to feel shocked and ashamed at the casual murder and the equally casual apology for having killed the wrong man; we cannot turn away without remorse and laugh.

In the structural arrangement of the original text the object which is given priority is ‘the knife’. It hovers like a threatening presence over the text and controls it thematically. Manto deliberately places it in an isolated sentence surrounded by empty spaces so as to make it a metaphor for the partition as an annihilating event. What makes the knife terrifying to contemplate is that it has a remorseless and mechanical force of its own; it requires no human agency and it kills automatically, pitilessly and repeatedly. The man who wields it is merely a part of its mechanism of slaughter; he has no will of his own and no religion or nationality which defines him. And the victim, whose body it cuts open, is only a cadaver. By making the knife such a powerful presence, Manto wants to suggest that the partition has nothing to do with freedom or religiosity. He is sure that those who want partition are only concerned with power — with all its intoxication, pride and humiliation.⁴⁵ It is because of his strong condemnation of the partition as a political act which trifled with the life, religion and culture of a people that the protagonists of the Pakistan movement still continue to find him difficult to deal with.

Hasan, however, shifts the attention away from the knife. He removes it from its predominant position in the original, and slips it into one of the secondary clauses in a tedious sentence made up of melodramatic assertions. Instead of gazing at the knife with fear, we are made to watch, rather voyeuristically, the quivering flesh of the victim being slit open. The suspense of the original is created out of a series of brief, harsh and brutally factual sentence fragments. The translation slides along casually from one phrase to the next, describing how the man’s pyjamas are held up by a cord and the knife rips through his belly “cleanly.” Manto is a better storyteller and more

subtle a thinker than the translator. He understands the economy of words, and doesn't pause to give explanations or information. A story of violence requires a certain degree of asceticism of language. It is precisely Manto's restraint which makes the original so disturbing. Manto also understands that in times of extreme violence, instruments of torture and murder acquire a life of their own, and people who use them become servile to them. By discarding the lineation of the original text, Hasan destroys its meaning and ruins its dramatic impact. Perhaps, the first sentence of the story could have been translated more effectively as follows:

The knife
plunged into the stomach
ripped through the abdomen
cut the string of the pyjama.

The second sentence is equally poorly translated. Manto intentionally breaks it up into five distinct and fragmentary units. The first three lines are sharp, harsh and spasmodic. Their quickness of movement dramatises both the wild plunging of the knife and the shocked surprise of the killer — it is typical of Manto's irony that the victim is left unacknowledged; he merely strays into a lethal historical time. The convulsive quality of the writing makes it apparent that for the knife wielding man, killing is merely a reflex action and the partition an excuse. In the original, there is no hint that he is capable of expressing "regret" or remorse — terms which give him a capacity for moral judgment and atonement. Manto is sure that the partition is neither a result of some recognisable ethical impulse nor of some profound religious need. Indeed, what is always scandalous about Manto is that, against all the weighty arguments in favour of the partition, he is willing to take the risk of asserting, with mordant laughter, that a whole civilisation was ripped apart for something extremely trivial and obscene — that the only way of distinguishing a 'true Muslim' from a 'true Hindu' was a man's foreskin. Therefore, the translation should suggest that when the killer realises that the victim belongs to his own community, he is either 'aghast' or 'disgusted' — words which are closer to the original and indicate that during the partition murder was no more than an instinct, a mindless passion, which hardly left a trace of remorse in the killer.

The sense that the man kills because he is moved by some innate bestial urge is affirmed by the last exclamation, when he splutters incoherently,

“Chi, chi, chi...” The vulgar and aggressive theatricality of the expletives cannot be replaced by the decorous and effete, “Oh, no...” Manto, unlike Hasan, understood that the partition not only deformed men, it also debased language. Indeed, one must hear the slow spitting-round of “Chi, chi, chi...” before one reaches the slurred consonant in “mishtake.” The catch here is: should one laugh at the lumpenisation of language, or feel ashamed at the pornography of casual murder. Hasan, obviously, chooses easily and opts for the former.

Further, Hasan, in keeping with his normal practice, underplays all religious references which Pakistani nationalists or Muslim fundamentalists may find problematic. That is why, one suspects, that he ignores the complexity of the fourth line and erases Manto’s bitter mockery of communal politics. By refusing to find an imaginative way of translating the compound phrase, “*Kalma-i-taassuf*,” he directs attention away from the strong religious undertow in the phrase. It would surely have been pointless for Manto to write about the massacres during the partition without clearly indicating, with all the contempt at his disposal, that the killers belonged to religious communities — that killing gave them a sense of identity and of destiny. The partition may have, to some measure, been a result of economic concerns or political fears, but it was primarily caused by religious intolerance and contempt — a fact which has yet to be fully investigated by the historians of the period.⁴⁶ Manto would have read with grim laughter the recent assertions by some Pakistan critics like Muhammad Umar Memon and Salim-ur-Rehman that, for the Muslims, 1947 was a moment “filled with grace,” and that they rejoiced in the partition because it was “the telos of burgeoning historical expectations.”⁴⁷ Manto would have found this language, as all of us must, morally disgraceful. He would have rejected, with equal vehemence, the claims of the Hindu fundamentalists that they alone were the embodiments of culture and holiness. Indeed, if ethicality can only be tested in the visible civil and political spaces of a society, such apocalyptic statements about the partition should be made in the middle of streets littered with corpses — then at least we should know that doom is a part of all such teleological dreams.⁴⁸

There is, hence, a deliberateness of purpose in Manto’s use of the phrase “*kalma-i-taassuf*.” The liturgical ring of the phrase calls attention to itself because it is placed between the dramatic briskness of the previous lines and the staccato sounds which follow. It is a sonorous phrase which

acquires a strange preternatural force because of its ironic placement between a brutal murder and its casual dismissal; all the shards of reasons for the partition seem to gather around it and make the partition into a shameful, causeless and demented historical event. (A historian like Ayesha Jalal thinks of the partition merely as “the theater of the absurd” — a metaphor which accepts the partition as politically senseless, but fails to acknowledge the enormity of the human suffering involved.)⁴⁹ Fiction writers like Manto, however, insist that any action should be judged by its moral consequences. We must ask, for instance, if we can approve of a political demand which leads to genocide. What makes the usage of the phrase “*Kalma-i-taassuf*” even more interesting is that it persuades us to think about the ritual repetition of holy words uttered to save us from following the path of sin (the Hindi editors of Manto’s *Dastavez* notice this, but they seem to be alone in doing so). The words which the killer utters, however, indicate how completely incapable he is of reciting the ‘*Kalma*’; how far removed he is from grace.

The greatest damage Hasan does to Manto is to communalise him. He does so systematically, with design and in bad faith. In nearly every story Hasan translates there is an apparent communal purpose behind his omissions, shifts and quiet additions. Take for instance the translation of “Thanda Gosht,” a story which got Manto into trouble with the new Pakistani government for obscenity. Hasan translates the title as “Colder than Ice,” instead of the more obvious “Cold Meat” so as to avoid Manto’s blunt association between sexual sadism, necrophilia and the politics of ‘saving’ women. Unlike Hasan, Manto is neither a moral prig nor is he afraid of giving offense (there are other instances of Hasan’s concern with the censors. He translates the title “Mootri,” as “Three Simple Statements,” instead of “Urinal,” the title “Khol Do,” which in the story refers to the automatic response a rape-victim makes by lowering her pyjamas and spreading her legs when she hears those words, as “The Return,” etc.). What is, however, more disturbing about Hasan’s translation is that he slips in phrases which are not there in the original so as to give the story a nasty religious edge. Manto is painful to many because for him murder is murder, and no amount of religious mantras can swindle him into believing otherwise. Yet, Hasan would have us believe that “Thanda Ghost” is Manto’s particular condemnation of Sikh atrocities against the Muslims. Consider the following confession Ishar Singh makes to his wife in the Urdu version:

"Kulwant meri jan! Main tumhein nahin bata sakta, mere saath kya hua...? Insan kudiya bhi ek ajeeb cheez hai... Shahar mein loot machi to sabhi kee tarah mainey bhi usmein hissa liya... Gahne-patte aur rupaiye-paise jo bhi hath lagay, veh maine tumhein dey diye... Lekin ek baat tumhein na batae..." (Dastavez, 2, p. 272)

Hasan edits out Ishar Singh's general assessment of human nature and omits stating that everyone was looting. Instead, he assumes that Ishar Singh is talking about targeting the Muslims and becoming a member of one of the gangs engaged in causing all the torment. His translation reads as follows:

"Kulwant, jani, you can have no idea what happened to me. When they began to loot *Muslim shops* and houses in the city, I joined one of the gangs. All the cash and ornaments that fell to my share, I brought back to you. There was only one thing I hid from you." (Italics added, p. 28)

Even from the fragmentary example taken from the Urdu text, it should be clear that Manto's concern is not with laying blame on a particular community, but with trying to record a world in which anyone can drift into cruelty and slaughter. He crafts nightmares, not communal texts; he is difficult precisely because he doesn't suggest a religious solution to the politics of pain that was enacted during the partition.

The trivialising impulse in Hasan is at its demonstrative best in his translation of "Yazid." This is a pity because "Yazid," which is an enduring story, has rarely been translated. Included in the last collection of stories Manto published in his life-time in a volume entitled *Yazid* (1951), it marks a major departure from the mournful and damning stories he had written about the partition earlier. "Yazid" signals both an end to a long period of mourning over the partition and a search for a new secular faith in life-giving energies and associations. What makes the story deeply interesting is that, while Manto refuses to take his eyes off the actualities of suffering, he offers a fine reformulation of 'faith' as that which human beings do out of affectionate regard for each other. This shift in the definition of 'faith' enables him to suggest two things. One, that we give up our rage for ritual and religious

identities, in order to escape, both from the fated programmes of life we think are inscribed in religious texts and the melodramas of power; and, two, that we begin to regard our little rituals of marriage, childbirth, friendship or burial as acts of moral care which are sufficient for our common survival. "Yazid" is a compelling and a brave story because it is Manto's most convincing refutation of the 'two-nation theory'.

Hasan changes the title of the story and calls it "The Great Divide." By doing so he radically alters the essential thrust of Manto's text. The phrase, 'the great divide,' is a cliché commonly used to argue that, since there was a long history of irreconcilable differences between the Hindus and the Muslims, the demand for Pakistan was historically inevitable and politically necessary. Hasan's title suggests that the story is important, not because it makes a moral and an existential investigation of the ways in which we can stop living theologically and mythically, and hence less fatally, but because it offers yet another legitimisation of Muslim League politics. Hasan tries to divert attention away from Manto's harsh assertion that religious bigotry destroyed communities which sustained Hindus and Muslim together, in order to persuade us that Manto only wants to describe the plight of a few Punjabi villagers in Pakistan living in fear of renewed Hindu aggression a few years after 1947. As usual, therefore, he simplifies Manto and transforms the story into an anecdote. He fails to notice that the real significance of the story lies in the fact that Manto, who sees himself as an exile, is moving toward a new ethical position which is radically distinct from ideas he has held before: that those who have suffered great political wrong have a responsibility to ensure that *caritas* is never erased from our visible civil spaces; that migrants from a past of nightmares must cease to be fascinated with their own weakness and refuse to surrender ever again the autonomy of the self either to nostalgia or to hate; and, that it is possible for exiles of the partition to remake their communities provided they give up their dependence on that which is merely religious or political, and instead ask themselves what it is that is immediately necessary and what will suffice to sustain life in a community.

By calling the story "Yazid," Manto draws upon one of the foundational events of Islam. In Islamic history it is said that during the battle of Karbala, Yazid denies water to Hasan, Hussain and their followers, and so ensures their defeat and death. Like Satan and Ravana, he is the figure of primal evil, the demon of unreason who threatens with destruction

all that is virtuous. Manto invokes Yazid and the origins of Islam for two complex and interwoven reasons. One, he uses Yazid analogically in order to reexamine the historical assertion that hatred between the Muslims and the Hindus is a fact which has always defined the relations between them from the very beginnings of their contact with each other in the India subcontinent. Two, he uses the figure of Yazid ethically so as to reject the claim of the protagonists of the two nation theory that their migration was a *hijrat* in search of an Islamic homeland free from the threat of contamination by the Hindu *Kafirs* (Yazids), just as the wanderings of the earliest disciples of Mohammed were an aspect of the necessary rites of passage towards a sanctified place.⁵⁰ Manto, in contradiction, wants to suggest that Yazid is not out there in a community whose faith is different from the Muslims, but *a part of each of us*, Hindus and Muslims alike — that we are Yazids when we refuse to take responsibility for our actions or when we dream of killing as a way of proving our holiness; and, that the history of relations between the Hindus and the Muslims was as complicated a mixture of harmony and antagonism as is the case with any group of people who have lived together for ages. Thus, he *uses* Yazid, not to strengthen the historical or religious claims of a few survivors of the riots in Pakistan, but to replace the language of religion by the practice of a mode of analysis which is concrete, moral and psychological, and in the service of community-making.

It is difficult to enumerate the variety of ways in which Hasan's translation damages the text of the story. His changes, additions, deletions, misreadings and summaries are so extensive and arbitrary that the English version of the story resembles the original only in its essential outlines. It is, however, worth describing a few of Hasan's intrusions and elisions which twist the story in ways antithetical to Manto's intentions.

In the opening sentence, the narrator (who is not necessarily Manto — he is after all not writing an autobiographical anecdote but a work of fiction) suggests that the troubles of the partition were disruptions in the daily lives of the villagers; they came and went like a few days of unseasonable weather in any normal cycle of seasons. The context of the story makes it clear that the narrator's reasons for making an equation between the riots that disturbed the peace in 1947 and unexpected hours of inclement weather are two-fold: he is offering his own version of Fernand Braudel's notion of the 'long duration' of history in which 1947 seems to be less atrocious than

it does to those who are caught in the immediate catastrophe; and, he is hinting at the singular ability of the central character of the story, Karim Dad, to deal with suffering as an integral part of the process of living, and to assert that in any life there are seasons of sorrow and seasons for celebration. The opening sentence, thus, provides the historical and ethical presupposition of the story and is crucial for our understanding of Karim Dad's actions.

In the original the opening sentence reads as follows:

"San saintlees ke hungamey aaye aur guzar gaye, bilkul usee tarah jis tarah mausam mein khilafe-mamool chand din kharab aayein aur chale jayein... (Dastavez, 2, p. 183)."

Hasan translates the sentence as follows:

"The 1947 upheavals came and went, much like the few bad days you get in an otherwise sunny Punjabi winter (p. 132)."

Hasan's translation of the sentence is deaf to its nuances and its fictional purpose. Without any sanction from the original, he converts it into a localised observation about "a few bad days you get in an otherwise sunny Punjabi winter." He, thus, transforms an important statement about character and history into a personal report on provincial weather. There is no mention about sunny winters of Punjab in the Urdu text, nor does the narrator address any listener or reader directly in order to seek his approval of or complicity in his trite observation. In any case, Manto knows better than to provoke us to ask who the pronoun "you" refers to and where is he located in the fictional structure. The narrator's statement is addressed to anyone who has meditated upon human affairs, and perhaps sought consolation by locating them within the larger stability of either nature or culture. Such thinking, he knows, doesn't lessen the suffering or erase the memory of loss, but it does make sorrow a little more endurable.

Manto knows, with the usual intelligence of a good short story writer, that cadences of speech, qualities of diction and action are inextricable aspects of making a character. Hasan, on the other hand, with his continuous disregard

for the requirements of fictional narratives, thinks that a few random verbal strokes, made without paying attention to tone and diction, are sufficient to indicate a character's role in carrying the action forward. The fact that the purpose of the story may not lie only in the incidents described, but in the character's complex presence within them is of no consequence to him. Thus, in the original, after Karim Dad buries his father, who dies fighting during the riots, he stands by his father's grave near a village well and says: "*Yaar, tumney theek nahin kia...Mainey tumse kaha tha ki eik-aadha hathiyaar apne pass zaroor rakha karo...!*" (Dastavez, 2, p. 183) If one has to convey the coarse poetry and informality of Karim Dad's speech in English, one should perhaps translate it as: "Yaar, what you did wasn't right...Didn't I tell you to keep a weapon or two with you...!" Hasan, however, translates it prosaically as an address to no one in particular: "He should have listened to me. Didn't I tell him one must keep at least one weapon on one's person these days" (p.133)? The original is a direct admonition to his father as a familiar and a friend. There is sorrow in it, but there is also a jauntiness of spirit and ability to accept life's difficulties — indeed, all the qualities which later enable Karim Dad to find the resources within himself and his immediate surroundings to leave his memories of pain behind. Hasan's translation, on the other hand, is cliché-soaked. It flattens out the rhythmic particularity of Karim Dad's speech which distinguishes him from his neighbours who are equally distraught. Hasan drags him down to the level of the common-place and so produces a disjunction between what Karim Dad appears to be now and what he will do later.

Like all finer works of fiction, "Yazid" is shaped by paradoxes which undermine the expected and the ideologically determined. In nearly every story about sexual desire which Manto wrote before the partition, he presented sexuality as an extension of the loathsomeness of the social realm. In "Yazid," surprisingly, he writes a rare story in which the erotic is joyous and exuberant. In the midst of the unreality of the partition, he describes the immodesty of love-making. Casual delight, he seems to suggest with a deliberate wink at the clergy and the judge, may be the earthly equivalent of grace.

In the story, Karim Dad insists, even before the villagers have completed the rites for the dead and ceased to weep, on celebrating his marriage with lights and music. Others are still absorbed by their fears, which make them once again susceptible to jingoism, indoctrination and hysterical action.

They think that his marriage procession is a march of ghosts through their village community. Karim Dad knows that, in their refusal to make a rational analysis of the actual relations between the Hindus and the Muslims, they had once confused the ghosts of history and religion with reality which had caused the partition and its agony. He, therefore, laughs at them and refuses to make religion and hate the basis of his new existence. Instead, he attempts to remake his life through sexual and familial love. His wonderfully gross language, which mixes crude sensuality with tenderness, sets into motion the celebrative process of generativity. Hasan's translation retains some of the gentleness of Karim Dad's love for Jeena (whose names means 'life'), but makes it sentimental by deleting long sections in which Manto insists on revealing how desperately hard-won their love for each other really is, how long a period of mourning they have to work through in order to win for themselves some "moral time"⁵¹ for pleasure, irreverence, laughter and children.

Manto inter-cuts the description of their maturing love, with constant reminders of the massacres of their relatives and friends, in order to show how they come to realise that the claims of human desire are far more worthy than the claims of religious texts and tribal identities. Hasan not only edits the text in order to tell a simple love story, he also adds a long paragraph explaining who Hasan and Hussain were and how Yazid had caused their defeat, in order to give an Islamic frame of reference to the narrative. If in Manto's version Karim Dad and Jeena, slowly and painfully, learn through experience to make a commitment to a moral life, in Hasan's version they become a part of a Muslim narrative and a political statement.

Just as he longs for a life of fulfilled desire, Karim Dad also longs for a life of social coherence. Given the history of recent times, he understands the fragility of civil reason, yet he seeks to recreate life around traditional institutions of marriage and village community. Driven both by, what Robert Jay Lifton calls, the self's instinctual urge for immortality,⁵² as well as his own worldliness and realism, he argues with his friends and neighbours who have survived, that their present suffering is as much a result of their own logic and decisions as it is of the action of the people they now regard as their enemies. He urges them to understand that the partition is a social and political event, instead of thinking about it as a religious melodrama in which Hindu villains are fated to play out their role as killers. Political history, he tells

them, is radically different from a mythic narrative. In the first, antagonism of the moment has historical causes and one can find a solution to it; in the second, deliverance from evil is impossible and all one do is either pray or curse.

The argument between Karim Dad and the villagers, about the untrustworthiness of the Hindus and the necessity of revenge, is an elaborate one. It is conducted in the village square, through a series of brief exchanges which are colloquial, robust and earthy. While the village headman, Choudhry Nathoo, is jingoistic and abusive, Karim Dad speaks with irony and humour, cold logic and frankness. Manto crafts the dialogue between them and others very carefully in order to show how important it is to restore civil spaces where people can begin to learn once again that any moral and political dialogue can always be conducted without the use of force or the language of self-righteous anger. What is important here is to notice how Karim Dad's voice of calm reasonableness begins to be heard over the noisy rhetoric of the Choudhry, and finally gains a hearing.

Unfortunately, Hasan radically rewrites this section of the story. He cuts and pastes the original text so drastically that it is impossible to compare his version with the Urdu one in any meaningful way. He deletes the gestures Karim Dad repeatedly makes, which not only establish him as a man of self-assured grace and friendliness, but also affirm that he has worked his way towards a sense of psychic and communal confidence. Further, he transforms Karim Dad's insistent voice of reasonableness, which tries to persuade others dialogically, into a sermonising voice which imposes itself through assertion.

The section is too long to quote here in its entirety, but what is distressing in the last conversational cluster in the translated text and the manner in which it ends, is that Hasan almost completely edits the presence of Karim Dad's childhood friend, Meeranbuksh, out of the debate. Hasan's decision to do so both distorts the way the dialogue progresses and ends, and alters the basic intention of the story. In Hasan's text, Nathoo withdraws from the discussion pleading helplessness to offer any further argument, while Karim Dad merely gets up and leaves. The last part of the conversation reads as follows in Hasan's version:

“You are talking nonsense,” was all that the headman could counter Karim Dad with.

But Karim Dad had not finished. "It just so happens that the Indians are now in a position to take our water away from us. So, let's do something about it, instead of sitting here and abusing them. Don't expect the enemy to dig canals for you and fill them with milk and honey; expect him to poison your water so that you drink it and die. You will call it barbarism. I don't. If it is war, then war it is, not a wedding contract with pre-conditions and the rest of it. You can't say: all right we will go to war, provided you don't starve us or take away our food. If you must fire at us, use only a certain brand of cartridge. Be reasonable."

"And how do I do that?" Choudhry Nathoo asked. Karim Dad did not answer, but rose and left (p. 141).

Manto's original text, however, is radically different and reads as follows:

Choudhry Nathoo bhin gaya: "Yeh tu kya bakwas kar raha hai?"

Meeranbuksh ne bhi haule-se Karim Dad se poochha: "Par yaar, yeh kya bakwas hai?"

"Bakwas nahin hai Meeranbuksha..." Karim Dad ne samjhane ke undaz mein Meeranbuksh se kaha, "Tu zara soch to sahi ladai mein dono phareek ek dusarey ko pachchadney ke leya kya kuchch nahin kartey...Pahalwan jab lungar-lungot kaskey akhade mein uttar aatey hain to unhain har daav isteymaal karney ka haq hota hai."

Meeranbuksh ne upna jhuka sir hilaya : "Yeh to theek hai."

Karim Dad muskaraya: "To fir dariya band karna bhi theek hai...Hamarey leya yeh zulm hai, magar unkey leya rava hai."

"Rava kya hai...Jab teree zeeb pyas key marey latak kar zameen tak aa jayegi to phir main puchchoonga kay zulm rava hai ya narava... Jab tere baal-bachche anaaj kay ek ek dane ko trarasaingey to phir bhi yahi kahena ki dariya band karna bilkul theek tha."

Karim Dad nein upney khushk honthon par zabaan pheri aur kaha: "Main zab bhi kahoonga Choudhry... Tum yeh kyon bhool jaatey ho ki sirph veh hamaarey dushman nahin, hum bhee to unkay dushman hain...Agar hamarey ikhtyaar main hota to humnein bhi unka dana-pani band kar diya hota...Aab jaab ki veh aiyas kar sakta hai, aur karneywala

hai to hum zaroor uska koi tord sochainegey...Bekar galiyan daney se kya hota hai...Dushman tumahre leeya doodh ki nahrein zari nahin karega Choudhry Nathoo...Us sey agar ho saka to veh tumhari paani ki har boond mein zahar mila dega...Tum us sey zulm kahogey, vehshiyapan kahogey, is leya ki marney ka yeh tareeka tumhey pasand nahin...Ajeeb si baat hai ki ladayi shuroo karney sey pehaley dushman sey nikha ki si shartein banvayi jayen...Us sey kaha jaye ki dekho, mujhey bhookha na marna...Bandook si aur veh bhi itney bore ki bandook se, albaata tum mujhey shock se halal kar saktey ho...Aasal bakwas to yeh hai...Zara thandey dil se socho!"

Chaudhry Nathoo jhunjhulahaat ki aakhari haad tak pahunch gaya: "Baraf la ke rakh mere dil par."

"Yeh bhi main he laun?" Yeh kehkar Karim Dad hansa. Veh Meeranbaksh key kandhey par thapki deykhar utha aur chaupaal sey chala gaya (Dastavez, 2, p. 189-90).

This section can, perhaps, be translated as follows:

Irritated, Chaudhry Nathoo said, "You are talking rubbish."

Meeranbaksh also said quietly, "That's right, yaar, you are talking rubbish."

"I am not talking rubbish..." Karim Dad said, trying to make Meeranbaksh see reason. "Why don't you understand that in a war enemies try to do everything possible to defeat each other...When a wrestler tightens his loin-cloth and steps into the wrestling pit, doesn't he have the right to use any subterfuge, any hold...?"

Still tense, Meeranbaksh nodded his head in agreement, "Yes, he has the right."

Karim Dad smiled, "Then it follows that an enemy also has the right to dam a river...We may think it's unjust, but he thinks it's just..."

"How is it just...? When your mouth is dry and your tongue hangs down to the ground, then I'll ask you if it's just or unjust...I hope that when your children are dying for a grin of wheat, you'll still say that it's just to dam a river."

Karim Dad ran his tongue across his parched lips, "Even then I'll say it, Choudhry! You forget that if they are our enemy, we are their enemy too...If we had the power, we'd also dam their river and destroy their crops...Since they can dam the river, and are about to do so, we

should do something about it...There's no point in cursing...Your enemy will not dig a canal for you and fill it with milk, Choudhry Nathoo...If he can, he'll mix poison in every drop of water you drink...You may think it's barbaric, because you don't want to be killed like that...But isn't it strange that, even before you go to war, you want to lay down conditions, as if you are negotiating a marriage contract...? You want to plead, don't let me starve to death. Shoot me but only with a gun of a certain size...That, surely, is rubbish...Think about it with a cool head."

By then Choudhry Nathoo was at his wits end, "Why don't you get a slab of ice and place it on my head!"

"Am I supposed to do even that?" Karim Dad laughed. Then he patted Meeranbaksh on his shoulder, stood up and left the village square.

In Hasan's version, Karim Dad's attempt to find a language of community-making is suddenly aborted. There is no sanction for such an abrupt end to a dialogue whose texture and intention clearly suggest that Manto is exploring the possibilities of human renewal. Nor is there any sanction for naming the Indians as enemies. In Manto's version, Karim Dad doesn't walk away in triumphant silence. Instead, his witty repartee and final gesture ensure that the village square remains open for companionship and conversation. It is clear, as he teases Nathoo, that he knows how difficult it is to convert men like Nathoo to the side of reason — if the task was easy then the horror of the partition may never have happened, nor would the continued history of communal violence have demanded our attention. Without the last smile and embrace, "Yazid" as story remains an interesting addition to Manto's fictional history of a time when religion clawed its way across all that culture had created, instead of being what it significantly is — a fine meditation on the fate of reason and sympathetic imagination in times of political and moral disaster.

The importance of Manto's stories about the partition lies in the fact that he is neither a moralist nor an ideologue, neither a sermoniser nor a nationalist. Like a good fiction writer, he refuses to turn his gaze away from what he sees, even though he is bewildered and shocked by the pain human beings, in their frenzy of small claims and neurotic resentments are willing to inflict on each other. The best of his partition stories surprise one by bringing together, in darkly illuminating moments of existential understanding, terrible

violence and the beauty of the human yearning for sex, children, home and community which refuses to yield its instinctual energy to the death-traps religious fanaticism and extremist politics lay for us. It is, therefore, important to translate his stories with care in order to reveal how they are constructed out of a complex variety of strong voices — voices of protest and anguish, mockery and nostalgia, mourning and longing — voices which clash against each other and jostle for a hearing. Khalid Hasan's translation, unfortunately, is much too weak and sentimental, partisan and censorious to show us why Manto is the kind of witness whose work may help us understand our shattered past.

LECTURE 3

Defending The Sacred In An Age Of Atrocities: On Translating Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug*

My decision to translate Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* (1953) was the result of whimsy of course, but whimsy in the service of practical reason, and, given the present condition of the country, in the aid of political sanity too. I spent a semester teaching a course on contemporary Indian theatre with the help of English translations which were mostly bad. Strangely enough, *Andha Yug*, which was so literally translated as to seem like a long poem without any distinguishable theatrical or moral voices at all, and so thoughtlessly edited as to confuse any good logician, became the focus of rather disturbing discussions about the politics of revenge, the impotence of grief, the meaning of *karuna*, the failure of a morally responsible will to intervene in acts of violation, and the responsibility of the Gods in leading us to moral dereliction and decay.⁵³ Nearly every student pitied Gandhari, and there was a unanimous condemnation of Krishna. Krishna made them uncomfortable. He should have behaved more like a dissembling politician pretending to fulfil of our needs and wishes, rights and demands so as to win our votes, instead of acting like a God on behalf of morality and justice. Gandhari, they felt, was right in making Ashwatthama the invincible instrument of her revenge against the Pandavas. She had a greater moral claim to our sympathy than Krishna whose omnipotence should have alerted him to his responsibilities and, thereby, helped the Pandavas and the Kauravas evade a catastrophic war by transforming them into moral visionaries.

My students, I must insist, were not more ethically obtuse than any of us. After all, we all demand that Gods behave like highly-paid *karamcharis*, or non-government officers, look after our social and physical hygiene, be alert to all our psychological anxieties, and protest on our behalf against all the various kinds of caste, gender or class wrongs, instead of bearing witness to the causes of grief, or marking out places of evil in our souls and, sometimes, even singing praises for acts which are *just* so as to save that fragile thing called hope. Maybe, if we are more charitable, we think that God is no more than a junior judge in the lower court where "arid disputes"⁵⁴ are sorted out.

instead of being the very form and idea of the good which finds its earthly incarnation in acts of knowledge and work and love when they are performed with the full absorbedness of the soul.

Talking to my students about the moral issues raised by *Andha Yug*, I recalled what the great Jewish philosopher, Martin Buber, who had corresponded with Mahatma Gandhi about the ethics of non-violent resistance against a ruthless enemy,⁵⁵ had rightly said when he asserted that thinking about God was unavoidable in times of atrocities. Without invoking an absolute notion of the good or of the just, all our truth-seeking impulses, especially when our very existence as a people is threatened, can only flounder and fall into nothingness. Thinking about what could be absolute and unconditional for human survival during the years of the holocaust in Germany, years which coincided with the holocaust of the partition of India, he felt, as perhaps Dharamvir Bharati did, that no other "word of human speech is so misused, so defiled, so desecrated..."⁵⁶ as the word 'God'. Yet, Buber insisted, as I think Bharati does in the play, that in times of extreme violence the word 'God' needs to be defended with passion for our sense of ourselves as human beings depends upon it. Buber's case for holding on to the word 'God' is moving and eloquent:

Yes, it [God] is the most heavy-laden of all human words. None has become so soiled, so mutilated. Just for this reason I may not abandon it. Generations of men have laid the burden of their anxious lives upon this word...it lies in the dust and bears their whole burden. The races of man with their religious factions have torn the word to pieces; they have killed for it and died for it, and it bears their finger marks and their blood. Where might I find a word like it to describe the highest! If I took the purest, most sparkling concept from the inner treasure-chamber of the philosophers...I could not capture the presence of Him whom generations of men have honoured and degraded with their awesome living and dying. I do indeed mean Him whom hell-tormented and heaven-storming generations of men mean. Certainly, they draw caricatures and write "God" underneath; they murder one another and say "in God's name". But when all the madness and delusion fall to dust, when they stand over against Him in the loneliest darkness and no longer say "He, He", but rather sigh "Thou", shout "Thou"...and when they then add "God", is it not the real God whom they all implore, the One Living God, the God of the children of man? Is it not He who *hears* them? And

just for this reason is not the word “God,” the word of appeal, the word which has become a *name*, consecrated in all human tongues for all time? We must esteem those who interdict it because they rebel against the injustice and wrong which are so readily referred to “God” for authorisation. But we must not give up. How understandable it is that some suggest that we should remain silent about the “last things” for a time in order that the misused words may be redeemed! But they are not to be redeemed *thus*. We cannot cleanse the word “God” and we cannot make it whole; but, defiled and mutilated as it is, we can raise it from the ground and set it over an hour of great care. (Quoted by Murdoch, pp.420-21)

Buber’s God is the difficult and demanding Judaic God who is utterly remote, totally transcendent, yet ever watchful over human affairs. His presence, Buber insists, is essential for the survival of the soul in the conditions of extremity in which much of the twentieth century has been lived.

In contrast, Bharati’s Krishna, though equally firm and ruthless in his moral judgements, is a more humanly-cherished figure with whom the self can always conduct a dialogue. Because Krishna’s presence does not produce fear and trembling, he can be chastised and cursed, loved and worshipped, abandoned and killed. Indeed, it is not surprising that in the play, an ordinary man can set himself up as Krishna’s brother and, acting as the keeper of Krishna’s faith, chastise him for violations of the law. Balaram can, thus, tell Krishna:

Say what you like, Krishna
 But what Bhima did today
 violated dharma.
 His attack
 was an act
 of betrayal...
 The Pandavas are related to us
 but are the Kauravas our enemies?
 I would have confronted Bhima today
 but you stopped me.
 I have known you since childhood.
 You have always been
 an unprincipled rogue!⁵⁷

It is interesting to note that here, as elsewhere in the play, Krishna is neither seen nor heard. The Kaurava soldiers, who overhear Balaram, are delighted by his enraged condemnation of Krishna because it echoes their own blinding rage at their defeat. Krishna's replies fail to penetrate the noise of their own blustering and single-minded conviction about the rightness of their belief that power or might can always be translated into justice. Indeed, what alienates the Kauravas from our sympathy throughout the Mahabharata is their inability to imagine the infinite variety of ways in which the good manifests itself in the ordinary world and which may be the reality of Krishna. Like hundreds of Kaurava souls, we are tempted into believing that ambition, mockery and the palaces of glass are more worthy of all our efforts than accepting the grace of thinking about and seeking the good. Like the Kauravas, we invariably refuse to hear the voice of God and blame him when our ambitions are not fulfilled; refuse, like the Kauravas in the play, to gaze inwards and find within the sources of grievous wrong.

Yet, while teaching *Andha Yug*, my sympathies were with my students who responded with such rage against Krishna in the play because, after all, it is easier to ask what God ought to do for us, than to consider what we can do for God so that he searches for us.⁵⁸ Unlike Buber's God, who is 'elsewhere' and, thus, remote from the most contingent of human concerns and immune from our commonest judgements, Krishna is a more complex figure to deal with. His very human presence makes us demand that his actions and judgements support our present and relative interests or suit our contemporary style of functioning, and when he fails to endorse our ordinary desires, we turn away from him as if he is the reason for our guilty actions and the cause of our sorrows. The existing translations also misdirected the attention of my students. They captured the shrill voices of pain effectively, but erased the difficult cadences of speech and so muted the voices of moral anxiety of characters like Vidura, Sanjaya or Yuyutsu so as to drown them in the clash of armour and steel. Our moral difficulties were compounded by the fact that the two crucial scenes in which Krishna made his presence felt through small, gentle and loving things like the feather of a peacock or the sound of a flute or the music of bells ringing in the midst of desolation, were allowed to pass by as of little consequence so that we could get on with the real business of listening to the voices of the defeated shouting for revenge.

Given the intensity of the moral anxieties *Andha Yug* evoked, it was obvious that the play, written soon after the carnage of the partition of the Indian subcontinent, which nearly erased a form of life and civilization, and being read once again in our *rakshas* times of hysterical unreason, still had the power to make us realise how close we live to the borders of nightmares.

Unfortunately, however, the existing translations were not so finely inflected as to help us understand whether the play was about our anguish at finding ourselves in a terrible world where we could only lament and curse, or whether it invited us to hear, in its difficult notes of tragedy, our own complicity in evil. Judging from the fact that for a majority of my students it was the Gods who made the lives of Gandhari, Dhritarashtra, Duryodhana or Ashwatthama so bitter suggested that the translations had failed to guide their moral attention along the pilgrim path of truth, a path that Vidura and Yudhishtira never abandon in the play even in the midst of carnage. The translations, it was apparent, had not been undertaken after a critical analysis of the play. It was, therefore, not surprising that my students had failed to notice that the decisive events in the play, which had opened an abyss before the Kauravas, had nothing to do with supernatural forces seeking victims for their perverse delight. In Act I, for instance, Vidura reminds Dhritarashtra that, years before the war, his councillors had warned the Kauravas about the fate of kingdoms which refuse to abide by the laws of truth:

- Dhritarashtra** : Vidura
for the first time
in my life
I am afraid.
- Vidura** : Afraid?
The fear you experience today
had gripped others years ago.
- Dhritarashtra** : Why didn't you warn me then?
- Vidura** : Bhishma did.
So did Dronacharya.
Indeed, in this very court
Krishna advised you:

'Do not violate the code of honour.
If you violate the code of honour
it will coil around the Kaurava clan
like a wounded python
and crush it like a dry twig.'...

Yet from the very first day
it was obvious that the Kaurava strength
- the final arbiter of truth -
was weak and vulnerable.

Over the past seventeen days
you have received news
of the death
- one by one -
of the entire Kaurava clan.

Vidura is right in insisting that virtue is not a utilitarian service which can be called in to help when we are in trouble and forgotten about at other times. A moral life demands perpetual attention. And those, like Dhritarashtra, who fail to understand this, cannot hope to escape the consequences. In the balance of things, then, it is right that at the end of all the carnage which he had failed to prevent, Dhritarashtra is consumed by a relentless forest fire which is a manifestation of the desolation and the affliction of his soul.

The existing translations of *Andha Yug* had erased the distinctions in moral perceptions, which were carefully structured in the original Hindi text. They had also failed to keep the separation between the different levels of ethical awareness available to all human beings, so as to show why some characters, even those like Gandhari, whose suffering saturates us with pity, deserve their fate because they were actually responsible for the breakdown of the moral order and their own ruin with it. The original version of the play in Hindi clarifies repeatedly, sometimes through Vidura's moral commentary and at other times through choric interventions, as to why it was neither Krishna's hardness of heart, nor his political cunning, nor his amoral opportunism which made him insist that Karna and Duryodhana be killed ruthlessly. It also explains why he curses Ashwatthama to wander through the endless wastes of time. Karna, for instance, chooses to live with the Kauravas out of his mistaken notions of gratitude, faithfulness and duty. He

realizes too late that he had relied merely on armed might to protect him. It was not surprising, therefore, that when the forces of the Kauravas crumble, he finds himself standing in the mud beside his broken chariot, helpless, disabled and unarmed. What more can he teach us? As he shouts for fairness in frustrated rage, we are required to understand that power without the imagination of mercy can only lead to humiliation. Why should he continue to live after that? And why should Krishna not condone all means available to destroy him? The sacred, after all, is not required to make sentimental compromises when it comes to restoring the just balance of the world in which we live. In the face of an annihilating power, the sacred may use all the available ruthlessness that it can muster up in order to survive. We may, in our mistaken and fallen world, accuse the sacred of hard-heartedness. But, how else will we sometimes learn that there are limits of *adharma* and *atyachar* beyond which we may not go without inviting the wrath of the sacred?

Similarly, in Bharati's play, Duryodhana has to experience the shame of fear before his death for he had not understood it sufficiently when he had Draupadi stripped in court. There can be no consolation for him as he slides behind some watery reeds trying to hide from his fate, and is then crushed to death by Bhima - the coarse and brutal face of justice that sometimes must be revealed. That is why the description of his defeat in the battlefield in Act III, given to us quite appropriately by Ashwatthama whose understanding of the moral issues of the war is deficient, fills us with terror, but does not touch us with pity. This is how Ashwatthama describes Duryodhana's death to Gandhari - his voice marked with uncomprehending rage and contempt for the Pandavas:

The Pandava sense of honour
was on display today
when Bhima
violating all the codes of war
threw Duryodhana down
smashed his thighs
broke his arms and his neck.

And then
with his foot on Duryodhana's head
Bhima stood on him with all his weight

and roared like a wild beast!

The veins on Duryodhana's head
swelled and suddenly burst.
He screamed in pain.
His broken legs jerked.
He opened his eyes
and looked at his people.

As we hear this account of his death, we must, if we don't want our souls to corrode by seeming to relish such violence, stand beside Gandhari as she weeps over his death. But we must not, for the sake of our rational well-being, approve when she curses Krishna for her son's death and asserts that Duryodhana's victory would have been the triumph of dharma.

Duryodhana's miserable fate should, instead, remind us that he had erased the pledge to a minimum ethicality we must all make in our daily lives so that we do not act with crass stupidity in our encounters with the world. Till the end Duryodhana failed to see that he himself was responsible for the extreme perversion of life that war represents. There was justice in the fact that he died unconsoled, cursing Krishna. Words of repentance from him would only have added another untruth to the world. His fanaticism had to be isolated and identified as the cause of suffering. "Thus it is," as Simone Weil says, "that those whom destiny lends might perish for having relied too much upon it."⁵⁰

Duryodhana and Karna are, however, only a part of the argument, the moral imagery of the play, and not the primary concern of its theatrical narrative. The action of the play takes place on the last night of the Mahabharata war and is centred on the plight of a few bewildered survivors of the Kaurava clan – Gandhari, Dhritarashtra, Ashwatthama and a handful of others. The ramparts are in ruins, the city is burning and Kurukshetra is covered with corpses and vultures. The ordinary foot-soldiers of the Kaurava army are cynical about those who control the affairs of state. They are more concerned about their immediate physical survival than about questions of law or virtue. Besides, they know that dynasties change and fall, and that it is more prudent for people like themselves to stand by the rampart walls and wait for the next ruler who needs their services and is willing to pay for them.

- Guard 1:** Honour!
- Guard 2:** Disbelief!
- Guard 1:** Sorrow at the death of one's sons!
- Guard 2:** The future that is waiting to be born!
- Guard 1:** All these
grace the lives of kings!
- Guard 2:** And the one they worship as their Lord
takes responsibility for all of them!
- Guard 1:** But what about the lives
the two of us have spent
in these desolate corridors?
- Guard 2:** Who shall take
responsibility for us?
- Guard 1:** We did not violate honour
because we did not have any
- Guard 2:** We were never tormented by disbelief
because we never had any faith
- Guard 1:** We never experienced any sorrow
- Guard 1:** nor felt any pain
- Guard 2:** We spent our desolate lives
in these desolate corridors
- Guard 1:** because we were only slaves
- Guard 2:** We merely followed the orders of a blind
king
- Guard 1:** We had no opinions of our own

we made no choices.

Guard 2:

That is why
from the beginning
we have paced these desolate corridors
from right to left
and then from left to right
without any meaning
without any purpose.

Guard 1:

Even after death
we shall pace
the desolate corridors
of death's kingdom
from right to left
and then from left to right.

The other survivors, the ones who have invested the war with heroic arguments, are overwhelmed by grief and rage. They have lived for so long in *tamas* that they fail to notice how close they are to annihilation. Morally blind, they still cannot turn away from egotism, give up their fascination with power, recognize that others too have suffered, and stop longing for overwhelming vengeance which will redeem them. Ashwatthama, for instance, blinded by his passion for revenge, says:

I shall live
like a blind and ruthless beast
and may
Dharmaraj's prophecy come true!

Let both my hands
turn into claws!
Let these eyes
sharp like the teeth of a carnivore
tear the body
of anyone they see!

From now on

my only dharma is;
'Kill, kill, kill
and kill again!'

Let that be
the final purpose
of my existence!

We sympathise with the assumption of the remaining members of the Kaurava clan that a battlefield is the harshest of places anywhere, and that the only choices which matter there are strategic ones which can ensure survival or victory. That is why the survivors quibble about violations of the laws of war. They think that Krishna should act as a referee, and they curse him when, as the upholder of dharma, he judges them. Since they lose the war, they think it is futile to talk about right or wrong. For them, dharma is not that radical ethicality which a critically-alert reason always recognizes, and which could enable them to escape the sorrows and passions of profane time. They continue to debase the idea of dharma, continue to mutilate it, by thinking of it as nothing more than all that satisfies their personal desires in an utterly contingent world. It is not surprising, then, that for the Kaurava survivors, still thirsting for revenge on the last night of the war, Ashwatthama is the only saviour left. Indeed, Ashwatthama embodies what the Kauravas have stood for all along - ambition instead of peace, power instead of companionship, avoidance of responsibility instead of justice, contempt for everything instead of hope for the well-being of all things. One of the terrible ironies of the play is that Gandhari, refusing to understand the kind monster Ashwatthama really is, removes the bandage from her eyes so as to bless him with her visionary sight and give to his body the adamantite polish of precious stones. All her accumulated grace is wasted as, immediately afterwards, Krishna curses Ashwatthama and transforms his body into a putrid thing. It falls upon Sanjaya, the prophetic narrator whose task it is to tell the truth always, to describe Ashwatthama's physical decay to Gandhari as follows:

Sanjaya:

No, no!
He is hideous
his body is rotten
with boils and open sores...

For the sin of infanticide
Krishna cursed him
with immortality
and condemned him
to live forever and ever.

Cut and slashed by the Lord's disc
his body shall fester forever.
Soiled bandages shall staunch
the blood that shall flow
from his wounds forever and ever.

Lacerated, defiled, filthy and corrupted
he shall wander
through thick and deep forests
forever and ever.

His body shall be covered with boils
his skin shall rot with pus and scabs
and spittle and phlegm and bile
and he shall live forever and ever.

Excruciating pain will rip
through each limb.

Every bone in his body
will be corroded by suffering
and the Lord shall not let him die.

He will become an abomination
and he shall live forever and ever.

At the end of the play, as he tries to hide from human gaze, Ashwatthama becomes the dramatic correlative of the exhaustion of the ethical. His broken presence signifies that moment in the chronology of a civilization when, in complete despair, it ceases to believe that it has a future. That is why Ashwatthama can contemplate genocide, decide that everyone and everything on earth can be annihilated, and justify his decision to erase all traces of life as the inevitable consequence of the history he has lived.

What is awful about him when he releases the 'unthinkable' weapon, the *brahmastra*, is that he is the monster each of one of us can become when, afraid of losing our selfhood, we dismiss Krishna as a rumour or an opinion, and deny that the ethical must always have a sanctuary in human time.

Yet, throughout the play, as indeed in the Mahabharata, whenever we fear that life is now so accursed that we shall never again see the ordinary world, the Kauravas are given another chance to acknowledge their complicity in evil and turn toward the ethical. Indeed, just as in the Mahabharata the Gita lies at the heart of the story (I am not concerned about whether it is an interpolation), in *Andha Yug*, Krishna's presence, suddenly and unexpectedly, breaks into the narrative of pain – the soft sounds of a flute drift across the battlefield, a peacock feather floats down the ramparts, as if to remind the Kauravas that the sensuous world they, like all human beings, had once longed for, still lies just outside the present circle of suffering and needs the grace of justice and truth. And then, as Gandhari in her utter mistakenness, curses him for having caused the war, Krishna like a calm satyagrahi (I use this word lest we forget the play was written soon after the genocidal days of the partition when we had abused Gandhi), accepts the curse in the hope of bringing the cycle of violence and revenge to an end. It is terrible to watch her remorse as she realises the enormity of her fault. She suddenly understands that she has lost the last of the honourable choices it was still possible for the Kauravas to make, and that, henceforth, she can expect no mercy for herself or her clan.

Gandhari:

What have you done, Krishna!
What have you done!

Hear me now!
You will have to hear me today!

Hear me, Gandhari
who has sacrificed everything
who has lived a virtuous life
who has lived a life of penance
and has earned the right
to tell you this:
If you wanted

You could have stopped the war...

You incited Bhima's adharma
but you inflicted
a vile curse on Ashwatthama
who had committed no crime!

You used your divine power
for unjust ends.

If my sacrifice has any meaning
if my penance has any sanction in dharma
then listen, Krishna, to what I have to say.

You may be a god
you may be omnipotent
whatever you be
whoever you are
I curse you
and I curse
all your friends and kinsmen.
They shall attack and kill each other.
They shall eat each other
like rabid dogs.

And many years later
after you have witnessed
their destruction
you will return to this forest
and shall be killed
like a wild animal
by an ordinary hunter!

(Gentle sounds of a flute can be heard floating across the stage. The shadow of Krishna falls upon the rear wall of the stage.)

Krishna:

I may be a god.
I may be omnipotent.
But I am also your son
and you are my mother.

I said to Arjuna:
'I take upon my shoulders
the responsibility
of all your good and evil deeds.'

In this terrible war of eighteen days
I am the only one who died a million times.
Every time a soldier was struck down
every time a soldier fell to the ground
it was I who was struck down
it was I who was wounded
it was I who fell to the ground.

It is I who shall flow
in the pus
in the blood
in the spittle
that ooze
out of Ashwatthama's body
from age to age
forever and ever.

If I am life
then, Mother
I am also death.

I accept your curse, Mother!

Gandhari:

O Krishna
what have you done!

(Begins to weep loudly)

I did not weep like this
for my hundred sons.

O Krishna
as a mother
so deep and profound

is my affection for you.

You could have refused
to accept my curse!

Had you done so
would I have grieved?

I was bitter
heart-broken and forlorn.

I had lost all my sons!

Krishna:

No, Mother
do not say that.

I am alive
I may be a god
I may be omnipotent
but I am your son
and you are my mother.

That Krishna, given the chronologies of violence that follow the Mahabharata war, fails to ensure peace is not the fault of the good that he represents, or of the compassionate forms of life he pleads for. In Bharati's play, Krishna is the man of justice and truth we can all become. He is "the advocate of all created things and their finest embodiment."⁶⁰

If I am right, then the primary concern of *Andha Yug* is to reveal that the ethical and the sacred, that Krishna represents, is always available to human beings even in the most atrocious of times. That is why he is at the centre of the play and his abiding presence frames each act of the narrative during which the surviving Kauravas repeatedly refuse to acknowledge his righteousness and so slide further into moral and spiritual desolation. It is this aspect of Krishna's presence, which so clearly informs the thematic, the poetic and the structural patterns of the original Hindi play, that is either distorted or ignored in the existing English translations.

Andha Yug is a tragedy that happens because the Kauravas, in their greed, stupidity and blindness, so disfigure and deny Krishna as to blot out

from their social and political vision every possibility of creating cities of virtue and hope. The English translations, on the other hand, make the anguish of Ashwatthama and the sorrow of Gandhari the primary concern of the play. We are so overwhelmed by the knowledge of their suffering that we sympathise with them as victims of forces beyond their control and understanding. Krishna, thus, emerges as a capricious and manipulative god who kills us for his sport – a sentiment that may appeal to our present nausea with everything ethical or sacred, but is surely contrary to Dharamvir Bharati's intention, and, perhaps, not altogether encouraging for those who still dream of making good civil societies.

In my translation, I have tried to restore the sacred and the ethical back to the text. I want to ensure that my English translation does not become vulnerable to existentialist anxieties, but retains the play's essential tension between the nightmare of self-enchantment, which the story of the Kauravas represents, and the ever-present possibility of finding an opening out of *tamas* into a redemptive ethicality. My English translation, I hope, shall clearly mark out the fact that the stories of Gandhari and Ashwatthama are nearly always, and in every act, not only countered by different levels of ethical awareness, but are also framed by two different kinds of choric voices. I should like to call the first frame with which the play actually opens and which is sung as we watch dispirited soldiers drag themselves off the battlefield "*the chorus of sacred rememorisation*." This choric beginning is made out of fragments taken from Chapter XXIV, Book IV, of the *Vishnu Purana* and is meant to be sung in Sanskrit. It asserts that the sacred, which had once manifested itself in the ordinary and the profane world, can always reveal itself in historical time again – that even a battlefield can be the site of hierophany. It should, I think, be possible to convey the sonority of the *Puranic* song to the English reader by having the English translation follow each separate phrase or *shloka* in Sanskrit.

I should like to call the second chorus that frames the main narrative "*the chorus of ethical lament*". This chorus does two things. It provides a link between the different episodes of the story and, at the same time, it voices its moral dismay over the fact that the characters, in their perversity of selfhood, refuse to pay heed to the song of the sacred just heard, and slide further and further toward the blank silence of non-being and nothingness, toward *Andha Yug*. These frames of sacrality and ethicality, however, ensure

that, despite human folly, life shall always be granted a ground of mercy below which it will never fall. We are, I think, supposed to remember this even as we watch the story of Gandhari's curse and Ashwatthama's damnation come to an end with the final choric song:

That day the world descended into the age of darkness
which has no end, and repeats itself over and over again.
Every moment the Lord dies somewhere or the other
every moment the darkness grows deeper and deeper.

The age of darkness has seeped into our very souls.

There is darkness, and there is Ashwatthama, and there is Sanjaya
and there are the two old guards with the mentality of slaves
and there is blind doubt, and a shameful sense of defeat.

And yet it is also true
that like a small seed
buried somewhere
in the mind of man
there is courage
and a longing for freedom
and the imagination to create something new.

That seed is buried
without exception
in each of us
and it grows from day to day
in our lives
as duty
as honour
as freedom
as virtuous conduct.

It is this small seed
that makes us fear
half-truths
and great wars
and always

saves
the future of mankind
from blind doubt
slavery
and defeat.

Endnotes

¹ Samuel Johnson, "Preface," *Dictionary of the English Language*. Quoted by Richard Rand. "'o'er-brimm'd,'" in *Difference in Translation*, ed. by Joseph F. Graham (Ithaca and London: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), p.81.

² Wallace Stevens, *Opus Posthumous*. Quoted by Richard Rand, p.81.

³ Lawrence Venuti's phrase used to persuade translators from the becoming 'invisible' and to resist the domestication of the translated text demanded by the publishers and the readers alike. The 'foreignizing' or the 'minoritizing' of translation, he insists, is "highly desirable" because it resists "the ethnocentric violence of translation," and helps readers cultivate a "heterogeneous discourse." Cf. Jeremy Munday, *Introducing Translation Studies: Theories and Applications* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), pp.144-48. See also, Antoine Berman, who argues that the "properly ethical aim of the translating act" is to receive "the foreign as foreign." "Translation and the Trials of the Foreign," in *The Translation Study Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.285-86. It is worth noticing how far this position is from that of Dr. Johnson who thought that the very idea of the foreign was polluting.

⁴ Cf. Rand, "'o'er-brimm'd,'" pp.81-102.

⁵ Cf. Tzvetan Todorov, "Living Alone Together," in *New Literary History*, vol. 27, 1996, pp.1-14.

⁶ Jacques Derrida, *The Ear of the Other: Otobiography, Transference, Translation*, trans. by Peggy Kamuf (New York: Schocken Books, 1985), p. 98.

⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. by Barbara Johnson (1981:rpt. London: Athlone Press, 2000), p.169.

⁸ Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p. 116.

⁹ Iris Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1992), p. 25.

¹⁰ Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p. 124.

¹¹ Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p. 123.

¹² Jacques Derrida, "The Tower of Babel," in *Difference in Translation*, ed. Graham, p.166.

¹³ Derrida, *The Ear of the Other*, p. 96.

¹⁴ Cf. Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), p. 65.

⁵ Cf. James Knowlson, *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett* (London: Bloomsbury, 1996), p.674.

¹⁶ Paul de Man, *Resistance to Theory* (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1986), p.84.

¹⁷ This is the argument M. H. Abrams made during the discussion following de Man's essay on translation. See, *Resistance to Theory*, p.99-102.

¹⁸ De Man, *Resistance to Theory*, p.100.

¹⁹ De Man, *Resistance to Theory*, pp. 95-96.

²⁰ Walter Benjamin's famous essay, "The Task of the Translator," is in *Illuminations*, trans. by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken, 1969), pp. 69-82.

²¹ De Man, *Resistance to Theory*, p.91.

²² Paul de Man, *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971).

²³ "Thick Translation," in *The Translation Study Reader*, ed. by Lawrence Venuti (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp.417-429. Appiah however wants the translator to be "unfaithful to the literal intentions" (p.425) of the original so as to produce respect for and understanding of different human cultures and erase historical wrongs (p.427). I don't believe that it is the job of the translator to censor the past, or to correct and so redeem it.

²⁴ Cf. Thomas Macfarland, *Romanticism and Forms of Ruin: Wordsworth, Coleridge and the Modalities of Fragmentation* (New Jersey: Princeton Univ. Press, 1981), p. 5.

²⁵ It might be worth mentioning that 'The Book of Genesis' offers a radically different account of the origin of language from the story of Babel. Chapter 1 of Genesis equates God's power to create the earth in its infinite abundance with His capacity to utter language.

When God views the splendour of the world that lies before him. He is not overcome by anguish at the fragments of the sacred that lie before Him. He simply recognises and acknowledges His creation as 'good'. Adam and Eve speak to God as He walks in the Garden of Eden with the same ease as they talk to each of the creatures who inhabit the earth. Everything created is an aspect of the sacred, not distinct from it.

²⁶ Jacques Derrida, "Tower of Babel," p.167.

²⁷ This statement is in itself a re-crafting of Thoreau's assertion in *Walden* that "To imagine a language is to imagine a form of life," quoted in *The Senses of Walden* by Stanley Cavell (New York: Viking, 1972), p.62.

²⁸ Cf. Gabriel Josipovici, *The Book of God: A Response to the Bible* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988), pp.61-64.

²⁹ Cf. Walter Benjamin, "On Language as Such and on the Languages of Men," in *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, ed. by Peter Demetz, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (New York and London: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1978), pp.314-332.

³⁰ Josipovici, *The Book of God*, p.69.

³¹ Cf. Gadamar, "Text Matters," in *The States of Mind: Dialogues with Contemporary Thinkers on the European Mind*, by Richard Kearney (Manchester: Manchester Univ. Press, 1995), p. 269.

³² Walter Benjamin, "The Task of the Translator," in *Illuminations*, pp.69-82.

³³ Jerome Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1990), p. 95.

³⁴ Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, p.88.

³⁵ Martha Nussbaum, "Perceptive Equilibrium: Literary Theory and Ethical Theory," in *The Future of Literary Theory*, ed. by Ralph Cohen (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 60.

³⁶ I think that Nussbaum is wrong when she assumes that theorists like Derrida or de Man are all wit and urbanity without any guiding social or moral purpose. They, too, are concerned with, what she calls a "sense of life" ("Perceptive Equilibrium" p. 62). But, since, underneath the turmoil of life they find an abyss, their search for our moral fate gives way to verbal play as the only available option.

³⁷ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, ed. by C.B. Macpherson (1st published, 1651; Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p.105.

³⁸ Quoted by Hans Magnus Enzenberger in *Civil War*, trans. by Piers Spence and Martin Chalmers (London: Granta Books, 1994), p. 110.

³⁹ "Self-Help," in *Selections from Ralph Waldo Emerson*, ed. by Stephen S. Whicher (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960), p.153.

⁴⁰ New Delhi: Penguin, 1997. Hereafter, all references to this volume are included in the text. While Hasan's translations have been praised, the reasons for approval are curious. There are two clichés that are generally used about these translations. The first says that the translations are in "idiomatic English" and the second, that they capture the "flavour" of the original. No reviewer, however, bothers to explain what is so worthy about "idiomatic English," or what precisely it is. Nor does any reviewer ever pause to wonder whether the task of "capturing" flavours shouldn't be left to cooks and writers on culinary matters - that translators have a different kind of work to do! A similar criticism can be made of the other available translations of Manto by Jai Ratan, Tahira Naqvi and Madan Gopal.

⁴¹ Twelve of the stories included in these editions are taken from earlier volume edited by Hasan. See *Kingdom's End and Other Stories* (London: Verso, 1987).

⁴² For a detailed analysis of the story see my article, "A Dance of Grotesque Masks: A Critical Reading of Manto's '1919 Ke Ek Baat,'" in *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. by Alok Bhalla (Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study, 1997), pp. 28-54. See also my translation of the story in *Kunapipi*, vol. 13, no. 3, 1997, pp. 16-21.

⁴³ Many of these aspects of Hasan's translation have also been listed in detail by M. Asadudin in "Manto in English: An Assessment of Khalid Hasan's Translations," in *Life and Works of Saadat Hasan Manto*, ed. Alok Bhalla, pp. 159-171.

⁴⁴ All references to Manto's writings are from *Dastavez*, ed. by Balraj Manra and Sharad Dutt (New Delhi: Rajkamal, 1993), 5 volumes. Hereafter, all references to Manto's original stories are included in the text.

⁴⁵ Recently, Gyanendra Pandey has drawn attention to the curious fact that the history of religious politics in India has found little place in the accounts of the partition being written. See his book, *Remembering Partition* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2001).

⁴⁶ For a discussion of the relation between might and humiliation, see Simone Weil's wonderful essay, "The *Iliad*, Poem of Might," in *Imitations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks* (London: Ark, 1957; rpt. 1987), pp. 24-55.

⁴⁷ These remarks by Memon are taken from his unpublished article "The World of Intizar Husain." Memon's Pakistani nationalism and aggressive Islamic identity politics are, however, apparent in all his published writings. Thus, in an article entitled, "Partition Literature: A Study of Intizar Husain," *Modern Asian Studies*, 14, 3(1980), pp. 377-410, he says that, whereas the Muslim writers of the Progressive Movement remained attached to "Nehru's sentimental attachment to a united India" (p. 348), the Muslim Leadership "had the common sense" to realise that the idea of "communal harmony" was "unattainable" (pp. 383-84). The "course of history," he says, has shown "the progressives to be wrong..." (p. 396).

Memon feels under no obligation to say that a significant number of Muslim leaders did *not* feel that the demand for Pakistan was either commonsensical or justified by history — and continued to feel that way even after the partition. Indeed, if the new biographies of Jinnah are to be believed there is sufficient evidence to show that even the Qaid-e-Azam was ambivalent towards the demands for Pakistan. Memon, however, doesn't have to be worried about the complexities and paradoxes of history. For him the history of the partition is nothing more than a *feeling* for the aspirations of some Muslims who supported Muslim League politics. See Stanley Wolpert, *Jinnah of Pakistan* (Delhi: Oxford Univ. Press, 1984).

In his recent "Introduction," to *An Epic Unwritten: Urdu Stories about Partition* (New Delhi: Viking, 1998), he advises his Indian colleagues to be aware of deconstructive strategies, when they write about the partition. Perhaps. But it would have been better if Memon, instead of spending a good number of pages in name-calling and mud-slinging, had taken his own advice to heart and done precisely that.

⁴⁸ On the relationship between teleological fantasies and extreme violence see Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (London: Palladin, 1970).

⁴⁹ *The Sole Spokesman: Jinnah, the Muslim League and the Demand for Pakistan* (Lahore: Sang-E-Meel Publications, 1992), pp. 96-97.

⁵⁰ It may not be surprising to discover that Manto used the foundational story of Islam deliberately to counter the use of the same story for propaganda purposes by a major Urdu writer, Ahmed Nadeem Qasmi, who was a once a progressive thinker, but after migration to Lahore in 1947 had decided to write diatribes against India.

Qasmi's poem, which is of concern here, is a battle cry of the Kashmiri freedom fighter. Later, the great Pakistani writer, Intizar Husain, was to use the idea of *hijrat* for his complex exploration of the idea of home and civilisation.

⁵¹ Robert Coles defines "moral time" as a time of the awakening of conscience. See *The Political Life of Children* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1986), p. 71.

⁵² Robert Jay Lifton, *The Life of the Self: Toward a New Psychology* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), pp. 91-142.

⁵³ *Andha Yug* was first translated by Paul Jacob as *The Blind Age*. It was published in *Enact*, No. 65, May, 1972.

⁵⁴ W.H. Auden, "In Memory of Sigmund Freud," *Collected Shorter Poems* (New York: Random House, 1964), p.169.

⁵⁵ For Buber's letters to Gandhi see *Pointing the Way*, trans. Maurice Friedman (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957), pp. 126-47.

⁵⁶ Quoted by Iris Murdoch in *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 420.

⁵⁷ The English translations from the play quoted throughout are by me.

⁵⁸ The idea is taken from Simone Weil's *Waiting for God*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (New York: Harper and Row, 1951).

⁵⁹ "The 'Iliad', Poem of Might," in *Intimations of Christianity among the Ancient Greeks*, p.34.

⁶⁰ The phrase is taken from Walter Benjamin's, "The Story-Teller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov," in *Illuminations*, p. 104.

